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THE THRONE OF SATURN

THE THRONE OF SATURN

by S. Fowler Wright

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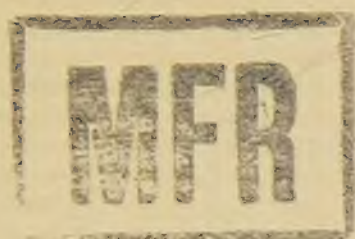
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Foreword

ONE who is a friend, a man of no mean literary judgment, and who has been kind to some things which I have written, recently surprised me not merely by saying he could not read a phantasy of which I was the author, but that he could not understand anyone writing such books if capable of other and (inferentially) better work.

Was this judgment sound?

Every work of imagination widens the frontiers of reality. It may have no objective reality, but precisely to that extent it adds to creation's sum. Men were; beyond that they built imaginations of things which were not. They may not have imagined facts; but it was a fact that they imagined things which had not been, and may never be.

A foolish criticism of *Ivanhoe* (foolish alike whether correct or not) is that it represents a scene which has little historical basis. But it would be wiser to say that (being vivid as it is) the more it be a work of baseless imagination the more admirable it is.

It is the contemporary habit to give first place to novels which portray men and events truly, observation rather than imagination being their inspiration. There is no need to depreciate such work, but they are only of the highest rank if it be better to crawl than to soar.

To recognise this is not to assert that every fantastic tale is of high literary merit. It may be a sounder proposition that it is such in proportion to the verisimilitude which it attains. Beyond that, all serious works of imagination will contain a philosophy of life, and the more they are without basis of mundane fact, the more clearly will that philosophy appear.

For these and other reasons, having written works of imagination of many kinds, both in prose and verse, among which phantasy has not bulked prominently, I am disposed, without claiming any absolute value for such works, to place them relatively not last but first.

The tales published here include all I have written of this order, of less than volume length, during the past thirty years, which I regard as worth reprinting. And to some of these I am less than sure of how accurately the description can be applied.

I have written some things (such as *The World Below*) which have been pure phantasy; and these tales, when first published, were so regarded. But some of what appeared to be their wildest imagination, such as the instantaneous destruction of a city by scientific devilry, have become fact; and some others certainly will.

S. FOWLER WRIGHT.

South Kensington,
January, 1951.

Justice

THE first evidence that can now be discovered of the gradually intensified feeling which resulted, ten years later, in what has since become known as the May Day Massacre is contained in an article on a quite different subject in the *Traffic Times* of October 22nd, 1962. This is no more than a passing allusion to "the salutary effects of accelerated traffic" in reducing the number of the infirm and aged members of the community; but, casual though it may be, it is evidence, perhaps the stronger for that very quality, of the impatience of the younger generation at the burden which had been laid upon them by the careful prudence of their parents and by the advances of preventive medicine and operative surgery.

It was four years later—in 1966—that the question was first raised in Parliament, and it was the following year that saw the passing of the Amended Penalties (Traffic and Roadways) Act, which provided a scale of fines for the fatal wounding or disabling of persons of not more than thirty years of an almost absurd severity, rising to a maximum of £63, but with a descending scale for persons above that age, until at sixty-five there was an absence of any legal penalty for such homicides, and for persons of sixty-eight years and over it was enacted that their estates or relatives should be responsible for any delay or expense occasioned to any motorist through their neglect or inability to get out of his way with the required celerity.

The fact was that the country had blundered into a position which might have been foretold by any actuary with almost mathematical exactness, but which does not appear to have

been anticipated, and against which no provision had been made.

In the first place, there had been a vogue of small families during the earlier part of the century. It is evident that the burden of supporting their elderly surviving parents must be more severely felt by a community in which they are as numerous as their children, than by one in which the proportion had been that of three or even four to one. It was evident also that the single child, having been brought up in an atmosphere of greater indulgence, and having had a more selfish example from its own parents, would be less disposed to sacrifice itself for their welfare than had been the child of an earlier generation, more hardily reared, and with ideals and examples of duty rather than pleasure having been set before it. It was therefore unreasonable to expect that the parents of these limited families would have the care, or be supported with the liberality, which their own parents had experienced.

The position would, in any case, have approached the intolerable; but it was made additionally acute by the fact that the average longevity of the race had been increased by about fifteen years, so that the new generation found itself supporting a proportion of elderly people such as had never been experienced previously.

By the year 1972, without any legislative changes beyond that already indicated, it appears to have been tacitly recognised that anyone who should be the means of shortening the life of one of these encumbrances would deserve well of his neighbours, but it does not appear, until the actual morning of the 3rd May (which was a Monday), that there had been any overt acts of resistance. The sudden violence of that and the succeeding day must have sprung from deeper roots than could have found their growth in any local incident, but the immediate suggestion has been shown, as the result of exhaus-

tive inquiry, to have originated in certain events which took place in and about the village of Fenny-Watford, in Warwickshire, on the preceding Sunday, May 2nd. These events may be briefly summarised as follows.

Richard Bede was a man of forty years, of good character and repute, though of a somewhat morose disposition. He had married twice, his first wife having died at an early age, and he had four children by his second, who was still living. He had been allotted a twenty-acre section under the Agricultural Regulations Act, 1963, which he had farmed intensively with sufficient success during the first five years of his holding to have his tenure permanently confirmed for so long as he should remain in good health and should not be convicted of any felony in the criminal courts.

At that time most of the houses which had been built with such expensive industry during the ten years following the European war had been demolished, they having become uninhabitable through having been erected with unseasoned timber, and from other causes; and Richard Bede, in common with most of the scattered inhabitants of Fenny-Watford, had been supplied with the regulation number of colonite sections, which could be clamped together to form either two or three rooms, as he might prefer, for the accommodation of his wife and children.

Richard Bede was at this time also burdened with the care of the parents and a maiden aunt of his first wife, the mother of his second wife (whose father had died two years earlier), his own parents, and one grandparent, an old lady of ninety-seven who still retained three of her teeth and a larger ratio of her original appetite. For these seven people he had received the State grant of sufficient colonite to enable him to erect one extra room, but no more. Beyond that he was without any assistance for their support, the various pension and allied Acts

of the earlier part of the century having been repealed at that date, after they had become so heavy a charge upon the community that they had been made the subject of a special poll-tax, which had become too unpopular to be continued when it represented so universal a burden that each man could reckon the amount he paid under this tax against the State grants that his aged dependents drew, and the disparity became too obvious an illustration of the disadvantage of having money withdrawn from his pocket to be returned when the "expenses of administration" had reduced its quantity. Nor would a man who was sufficiently fortunate to have no more than two or three of these aged encumbrances, who were legally billeted either upon himself or his wife, be content to reckon that he was in a state of continual poverty because he was supporting three of the eight or nine who were the overcrowding occupants of his neighbour's home. This position would have been less apparent had it been complicated by the inequalities of income which had prevailed in the earlier half of the century, but the subsequent levelling of remuneration and the confiscations which had taken place under the name of death duties had produced a position where the true effects of passing over the larger half of the national income to be spent by the bureaucracy had been exposed with a disconcerting simplicity. . . . But we must avoid explanations of this kind, if we are to maintain the straightforward course of this narrative. . . It was during the latter part of the Sunday afternoon that Richard Bede walked over the fields towards Oxshott House to see his neighbour, Reuben Turner, whom he found, as he had expected, busily hoeing potatoes, in spite of the fact that the day was still recognised as one of relaxation from the daily task of the remainder of the week.

Rube Turner ceased working as he approached, straightened a stiff back, leaned for a long moment on his hoe, and then turned without a word as Richard reached his side, led the way

to the hedge, and seated himself beneath it on the shadier side.

"Dick," he said, "I want a talk."

"I can't stop long, Rube. I just came over to fetch back the hoe. I thought you'd most like have finished with it by now."

"Well, I haven't quite, though I ought. But, of course, it's yours to take back if you want." His eyes went to the iron ferrule and blade of the tool that now lay on the grass between them. He looked at them intently, and then at Richard, as though expecting him to notice something of moment, but Richard's glance was indifferent as he answered: "I can make do until to-morrow, if that'll help. You might send one of the uncles over with it, if you can get him to come. The weeds don't give us much rest, this time o' year. . . . Not with the rain we had."

"Dick, you were on the inquest on Gaffer Tukes. How did they say he died?"

Richard looked at his friend in some wonder. "You know that as well as I do. He was fetched out of Rounder's Pool. It was a case of 'Found drowned', and we couldn't have told any more if we'd sat there for a week."

"Yes, I know that. But I mean what did they say among themselves? They must have guessed, more or less."

"I don't think I ought rightly to tell what was said in the jury-room. . . . But I suppose there were those, on and off, who thought he wasn't over-much loss, and what's in the heart comes to the tongue, more times than not. . . . He hadn't done a day's work for twenty year, near enough, and if there were those who said the care he'd had, an' the food, in that time might have reared a strong youth, instead of keeping an old dodderer with his mind all silly—well, it was the truth, as we all know."

"Then they wouldn't have been that hard, if they'd known how it was?"

"If we'd known, I reckon we should have said it straight; but

we didn't want to know, maybe, over-much. There's some things that are best left to lie."

Rube was silent after that for some time, looking down at the hoe. When he spoke again his words came quickly, as though they were blurted out on an impulse that he feared to lose by delay.

"Dick, I've scragged the old bitch this afternoon. She's over there in the ditch."

He did not raise his eyes, but kept them fixed on the hoe, which he turned over as he spoke.

Richard Bede noticed for the first time that there was a dull stain upon the blade, extending some ten or twelve inches up the haft.

"You mean you've killed Miss Sitwell?"

"It's yes to that. I fetched her down with the hoe, and wrung her neck like a fowl. I've felt a better man ever since. . . . You won't give me away?"

Richard Bede was not quick to reply. He said at last: "I wish you hadn't told me. Suppose I were on the inquest again. I'd not go against my oath. But I won't give you away. You can bank on that. . . . How did it come about?"

"I can see now that it's been coming any time these last two years, but it was what Marie told me this morning that took the lid off for the last time. . . . You know how it is with us. . . . We couldn't speak or move without that old hag's leave. . . ."

Bede knew that for the truth; Reuben Turner's trouble was of the same kind as his own, but with a difference. His aunt, Martha Sitwell, who now lay with a twisted neck in the ditch at the far side of the field, had been the owner of Oxshott House, an old solid-beamed Tudor structure which still resisted weather and wind while the ruins of a latter time that had lost confidence in its own stability had fallen around it. She had given a mean and grudging hospitality to her nephew, with

the various aged relatives that the State had billeted upon him and his wife, but she had done this on such terms that they were in a condition of virtual slavery. He and his wife must work in house and field not only in her service, but to supply the needs of six other more or less aged and incapacitated relatives. They had no help in this work, for domestic service was a thing of the past. The classes of the community from which it had been recruited had obeyed the admonitions of their superiors to cease the production of children, who were no longer to be regarded as of any national value, and the supply of domestic helpers had shrunk accordingly. Now the few that had been allowed to live were busy with the care of their own parents and aunts and uncles, and had they volunteered for domestic service of any kind it would have been on condition that they should bring anything from one to half a dozen of these encumbrances with them.

Reuben's father was dead. His mother still lived. She had had, at one time, an ample income. She had refused to have other children, saying that it was only so that she could afford the education and opportunities which every boy had a right to have. He had been brought up in an atmosphere of luxury and self-indulgence, ill-fitted to face the bitter unforeseen conditions which were the logical outcome of the creed she preached and practised.

Martha, her unmarried sister, had scoffed at her that she had married at all; she had blamed her for the single child, as for a needless folly. Could not a woman get all the best out of life without the bondage of marriage? Now that they were taught to avoid the hazard of children, was marriage to be regarded as the only alternative to an uncomfortable chastity? Not for those who moved with the times! The modern woman must have the same freedom as men (she said) had always claimed for themselves. So she had talked, and lived. Now her sister and her sister's child were in her house, and in the

grip of the money that she had saved. Then she might have endured with a bitter tongue, but there was also Marie the son's wife, and her parents, and those other unmarried relatives who were billeted upon them.

For these her nephew must toil, as must her niece also. If she allowed them a roof, was it not more than was due? Beyond that, they should have nothing from her, though she lived for another thirty years, as her doctor told her she might.

But on one point she had been firm from the first. There should be no children born in a house of hers. Whether it was from the bitterness which the childless woman will often feel when it is too late for all but regret, or from her hatred of her nephew's wife, or simply that she saw with a single-minded selfishness that her comfort must suffer if these two young people, who already worked to the limit of time and strength for the support and service of herself and the six other inmates of the house, should have another burden upon them—from whatever cause, she was resolved that Marie should have no child. And this resolution had so obsessed her mind that she could not leave it in silence for a single day. It had been the constant subject of talk and warning as she had followed Marie about the house.

. . . And this morning Marie had been unable to get up. And, being afraid, she had confessed to Reuben that she had concealed her pregnancy from him, being in terror of what it would mean when it were known . . . but Miss Sitwell had guessed . . . she had threatened her into taking a certain course, and this morning she was not well.

It was in the afternoon that Martha Sitwell had come out to observe the progress of the asparagus-beds, and that . . . it does not matter what had been said. There had been words between Reuben and her. They both thought that they had the best of them. Then Reuben had tried argument of a cruder kind. There was no doubt of who had the best of that.

Such was the tale to which Richard Bede had listened with a troubled mind. He hoped, if there were an inquest, he would not be called to serve.

"I've been thinking," Rube went on, "for the last hour. It makes a man think when he's just done the like of that. . . . I wish they were all gone the same way. . . . If there were just Marie and me in the house when we waked up to-morrow—Mother'd have thought it hard enough when she was Marie's age if she hadn't had half a dozen to wait on *her*. But, if we'd only ourselves to wait on, it would be heaven for us—we wouldn't ask for more. . . . Just ourselves and some children to work for as the years passed, and to rear in a natural way. . . . Dick, I fetched down the weeds with that hoe, and I wished every one were something different from what it was. . . . Wouldn't you be glad to go back to find that there was no one there but Bess and the four youngsters, and room to move?"

Yes, Dick allowed that he would. But what was the use of talking? So he asked, seeing no escape from the burden beneath which they groaned.

Reuben took up the word. "Talk? No, there's no use in that. It isn't talk that'll change things from what they are. . . . But I think of what's lying over in that ditch and I've got a feeling that something's started that won't stop. . . . I know we can't settle our own folk . . . not unless they're such as she. . . . But . . . Dick," he said, with a sudden whispered intensity, "they're all having tea in the end room. Marie's upstairs in bed. There'd be no one would ever know how it was. *Suppose you did it for me. . . . You'd find things different in your own house when you got back. You could trust me for that.*"

Richard Bede gave no sign that he heard. He gazed sombrely on the ground. Reuben was left in doubt as to the effect of his words, but he had gone too far to draw back. He went on to speak the thoughts which had been seething in his

mind for the last hour, as he had brought his hoe down on sorrel and dock between the rows of potatoes that they would have choked and blinded. It had been so soon done. So easy to do. It would have been more trouble to catch a fowl for the same end. It was so good to think that he would never hear that voice again. And she had thought to live for another thirty years! Thirty years!

"Dick, whatever comes, it's their own fault. They tried to cheat, and they didn't see that it can't be done. Not as they thought, anyway. They only cheated themselves and us. Their own parents had worked for them, and if they'd done for their children in the same way we shouldn't all have been in this mess now. Of course, they live longer than they did. Twice as long after children have grown up; and that means there'd have been twice as many poor old people for their children to keep, or rich old people holding on to the best houses and the best things; but I think we'd have stood that well enough. But with all these old men and women who only had one child, which means four for those who are married to keep when they start house, and with all these old men and women who didn't marry at all on the top of that . . . well, it's six, more or less, to be taken on for no one knows how long whenever a man starts a home, and what chance has a woman got for any kids of her own with them crowding the house, and wanting waiting on day and night, and no servants to be had for any money at all?

"They talked rot about thinking first about us, and *they* wouldn't be heartless enough to bring children into the world who wouldn't go to the best schools, and every child needed a nurse for itself (if not more), and they wouldn't see that they were living in a world that had been built up in a different way, and that it was only that which had made it possible for them to go on as they did.

"They wouldn't see that it was the men that made the wealth,

not the wealth the men—that if there were only one man left in the world, all the wealth it holds wouldn't alter the fact that he'd have to pig it as best he could.

“They wouldn't see that whether there were two parents or twenty to every child in the world, wouldn't alter the fact that every child couldn't be a boss when it grew up, because there's no top without something underneath.

“They made a boast of the ‘progress’ that enabled them to crowd together in one country while their food was grown in another, and then made that crowding an excuse for having less than half the children that their parents reared. There wasn't much progress in that! . . . And so here we are, but here we're not going to stay for the next twenty years, if I have my way.

“They'd always got money to build cars—look at the huge works that are lying in ruins now!—though they grudged bread for their children's mouths.

“They thought cars were better than children for them, and they'd like us to think that old men are better than children for us—but who'll look after us when we're old is a thing that they haven't said.”

The stream of bitter words stayed, not from exhaustion, but from a crowding of contending thoughts, each obstructing the other's birth, and in the pause Richard spoke at last.

“I think they understood well enough. They just wanted a good time for themselves, and beyond that they didn't care over-much. And it wasn't easy for those who tried to live differently, so they say. . . . And they were right in a sense. You can't fill a child's belly with petrol; a million tons won't give it a day's meal. You can't find the means of life deep underground, where it had better have been left. There's no life to be got from a dead thing. It's the soil and the spade for the means of a live child. It's no use going below. . . . No, they couldn't have it both ways. . . . Though I've heard tell that

there was enough waste of food in their kitchens for half a million to have fed fat. . . . But I don't see that you need to worry about us when we get old. Our children live hard enough. . . . They see us working for them. . . . They'll give us help in their turn. . . . And it's no use grouching over what it's too late to help. . . . You'd better bury what's over there, and hope it won't be found. . . . I don't suppose anyone's going to look far."

He spoke slowly, as one thinking aloud. When he had finished, he made a motion to rise, as though he would leave something with which he did not wish to interfere further; but Reuben reached a hand to his arm, pulling him back. He spoke again with the same intensity as before, but in a voice which rose to the resolution which was forming within him.

"No, Dick, you can't leave it like that. You'll get no hiding from me. *I don't mean it* to stop here. I want it known what I've done. It's all right for you to talk as you do. You'll maybe come out right at the last. You've got four. It's hard for you and them now, but it means hope in the end. But what about me, and thousands more in the same case? While that old bitch lived there were no children for us. And what time would Marie have had carrying a baby with those six to cook for and wash and clean, and they thinking they do their share if they can point to a plucked fowl, or a darned sock, or a dusted room?

"Dick, I don't care what happens to me. No one could much after the life I've had, and Marie feels just the same. But I'm going to do what I can to make this a different world. I've shown the way, and if others will do the same there'll be a different summer from what we've known for the last twenty years. There'll be merry England again. . . . Dick, shouldn't you like to go back to a real house, with just your wife, and the youngsters, and perhaps Mary Higgs coming in to do the

rough work instead of waiting on her great-uncle and her three aunts?"

He rose up with the word: "*Shan't* you like it is what I should have said, for you'll find that when you get back. . . . And I'll trust you to do the same for me here. . . . They're all in the kitchen now, having tea. . . ."

He went quickly, as though afraid that Dick would say something to refuse, even if he made no active obstruction, but Dick sat with his eyes still on the ground. He only looked up once, as he heard the click of the field gate. He saw that Rube was taking the path that led to his own home. He had the hoe still in his hand. Dick knew him well enough to understand that he would do as he said. He was one who was usually sparing of words, and who had a name for saying just what he meant.

Richard Bede sat still, and looked on the ground. He thought: "If I sit here, he will kill Mr. and Mrs. Parrott and Miss Hebblethwaite. He will kill old Mother Montague. He will kill my parents, and the old gaffer. But there is time yet. I can hurry after him, and tell him that I will have no part in such wickedness. . . . My people have done nothing to him. Why should he interfere?"

Then he thought of what the house would be with only Bessie and the four children in the space of the three rooms. Even if Mary Higgs didn't come in to help. It would be the peace of Heaven. And the leisure of . . . of . . . He had nothing to make comparison of that . . . of, yes, of the old days, when there were fewer old, and more young.

Yet he did not mean this thing to be. It was a monstrous thought. He rose up to follow Rube. Yet he must first look in the ditch. He did not think why he did this. He did not consider that the fatal moments went by. He must see what this thing was. He must look it once in the face. And then . . .

He was looking down in the ditch. Martha Sitwell lay on

her back, her meagre body, in its disordered dress, sprawled in a limp ungainly way. An ineffectual way. Anyone could see that she was dead, even apart from the evidence of the twisted neck, which hid her face in the mud.

That was the end of Martha Sitwell, who had owned Oxshott House that morning, and all it held. Who had thought to own it for thirty years. Martha Sitwell. . . . Martha Hatchnought would have been a better name. Well, all the same, it must end here. . . . He would go after Rube.

Over the silent Sunday fields there came the faint sound of a distant scream. . . . Richard Bede listened, and his face went white. He told himself that he had not realised that Rube had meant what he said. Not even as he looked down on that which lay in the ditch. Not till he heard that shriek. . . . And now it was too late. . . . Well, he thought, with an abrupt hardening of his mind, if that were so, it shouldn't be his alone that should die that day. Perversely enough, he felt that he would be avenging his own if he should deal with Rube's in the same way, and his thought was curiously confused with a sense of obligation, that he must not fail his friend; that Rube must not come back to find that his own millstone was not unloosened from about his neck; and under all there was the thought of the coming bliss of a relief such as he had never hoped to know. The picture that Rube had raised of a home in which there would only be Bessie, and the four children that were his. . . . After all, they had sucked up the best years of his life as water is sucked up by sand. . . . He remembered that Rube had said that they would all be having tea together; and the room had only one door. . . . He was not thinking now of whether he should do this thing, but of how best it should be done. He was a neater man than Rube. He did not like the thought of the hoe, or of the twisted neck. . . . The hoe must have come down on the top of her head. . . . There would be many tools in the shed by the garden door. . . .

There would be . . . And they would all be together at tea. . . . At least, that was what Rube had said an hour ago, but it might be too late by now. He did not want to have to hunt them over the house, making he knew not what mess in the rooms, and frightening Marie half out of her life. . . . Still, old people will sit long over a meal. It might not be too late. . . .

He turned towards the house with a quick step, and a vexed feeling of self-reproach for the wasted hour.

It seems that Rube told Ben Thomas what he had done, as he came from Richard Bede's house, with the hoe still in his hand. Had he not met Ben, and had not Ben had a bitter quarrel with his grandfather half an hour earlier, it may be that the thing would not have spread as it did, even then.

Ben was a weedy young man, with a damaged lung. The doctors had stopped the disease, but they could not put back that which was gone. He was no match for his grandfather, who was of a tough kind, though not large; and his grand-uncle was of the same breed. In fact, Ben had no part in the general grievance, for the old men were of active habits, and probably did their share of the world's work, and it may be more. The trouble was that they would have their way, and would treat Ben, who was over thirty, as though he were a child still. Ben hated them, as the weak hate those who override and despise them. His wife, herself of a weak and slovenly sort, hated them more than he. Ben asked to borrow the hoe.

With that weapon in his hand, and looking at the drying stains it bore, he felt a courage of hate and anger which brought him face to face with his grandfather, and lifted his arms for a blow which the astonished ancient only partly dodged. But when the second blow was struck the hoe was in the old man's hands, and he was soon to be seen running down the High

Street of Fenny-Watford, with his grandson in flight before him. Ben was saved by his legs.

The old man, getting short of breath, must stop perforce in spite of the anger which urged him. He was in a state of cackling triumph and indignation, with half the inhabitants of the High Street looking on, having been brought out of their doors by the noise, when Rube came upon the scene, having followed Ben at a quieter pace.

It was easy to see how matters had gone, and that it would be the end of what he had hoped to do, if he left it thus.

He walked up behind old Ted Thomas, who was not more than half his size, and could have made little resistance, even had he not been taken absolutely by surprise. Rube put his left hand in his coat collar, lifting him off his feet. He took the hoe in his right hand, wrenching it from the old man's grasp. He brought it down once on his head. It seemed no more than a hard rap given in a matter-of-fact way, but it was enough. Rube loosed his collar, and the old man dropped on the road like an empty sack.

Bill Thomas had pushed his way through the crowd, to see what the trouble was. He saw his brother knocked on the head, and burst into a high treble of protesting anger. Rube wasted no breath in words. He caught him up in the same way, knocked him on the head, and dropped him on the same spot. . . . Then he told the crowd what it meant.

. . . Perhaps, even then, it might have gone no farther if the old people in the crowd hadn't begun to run. . . .

* * * * *

The official figures gave 787,634 as the number of those who were massacred during the next two days, including many who perished from exposure and privation as they cowered in ditch or thicket from the merciless search which aimed at their extermination. Yet even at the height of this two days' frenzy

there were cases such as that of Charlotte Fordyce, who lost her life in a vain effort to save her parents; and of John Attwood, who gave shelter to over two hundred aged people in the brass foundry of which he was the proprietor, and defended it successfully with a fire-hose from the fury of the thwarted mob.

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This Night

It was the evening of Monday, the eleventh of January, 1980, when Professor Cawstin entered the ballroom of Dunstan House and stood quietly beside the door, in a slight isolation, of which he would have been contemptuous had he given notice to a thing so trivial.

His manner showed neither haste nor excitement, but his glance searched the glittering moving throng with a steady purpose, so that Belle Templeton, who had her own cause for unfriendliness, was reminded of a butcher that she had once seen surveying a herd of cattle (for he was a farmer also) to determine which of them he would consign to the slaughter-house.

He was a short, thickly-built man of about forty-five years, well though somewhat carelessly dressed, handsome enough in a hard-featured way, with bright deep-set eyes that were almost black, and a dome of forehead above them. He moved as one in robust health and the full vigour of life, and as one for whom his fellow-men had learned to step aside without protest.

When he saw whom he sought he made a straight way across the crowded floor and came upon a couple at the farther side of the room, just as the music paused and they were withdrawing to an alcove together.

He looked at the man rather than at the girl, to whom he addressed no word of greeting, and said without emphasis, as one accustomed to the obedience of those around him: "I want a few words with Lady Joselyn."

The girl—she was not more than twenty—looked startled, but not displeased. Selwyn Morecambe flushed an angry red,

but his eyes fell before those of Professor Cawstin, and he made no audible protest.

Joselyn realised the antagonism of the two men, possibly with some feminine satisfaction. It was, at least, pleasant to see Selwyn look sulky at the idea of losing her for a few minutes. It was rather more than a fortnight—Christmas Day, to be exact—since she had decided that he was the man she would marry, and she had not been quite certain as yet that he knew his fate.

“There’ll be plenty of time for another after,” she assured him, with a glance that was intended to divert his anger from her own head, to concentrate it upon that of the Professor, where it could do *her* no harm.

“Ten minutes,” said the Professor; “I’m not staying in this crowd.” He laid a compelling hand on her arm, which she did not welcome, though she was too controlled to give any sign of feeling. (Why had she always disliked men with hairy hands? It was like a gorilla’s.) “Where can we talk?” he was saying. “I suppose you know the run of this place.”

“Yes,” she said. “Being my aunt’s, I suppose I do. . . . Is it such a very private conversation? . . . Nobody will come in here, if the door is shut.”

She was inwardly puzzled as to what possible motive he could have for desiring such an interview with her. Puzzled—and a little afraid. But that was absurd. She was not frightened of any man.

She had led the way across the landing as she spoke (for the ballroom at Dunstan House is on the first floor) to a small boudoir which closed with a sliding door, beneath an archway, in the style which is common to the architecture of that period. Such doors can only be closed from the inside, and though they can be opened from without, the fact that they are closed is an evidence of occupation and of a desire for privacy, so that it is discourteous to disturb them, unless a servant be summoned.

Joselyn sank into the deep comfort of a large round-backed chair of the kind which was then in vogue, being built of a size and shape that invites a dual occupation. She did not choose it for that reason, but because her foot was against the bell. She was relieved when the Professor took the farther chair which she indicated.

Was she really afraid? She knew that her heart was beating at somewhat more than its usual pace. But what on earth could there be to fear? The door only closed the lower part of the high arch in which it was set. Her voice need scarcely be raised to call a score of friends to her rescue. The bell was against her foot. It was too absurd.

And the Professor was an important man, so that his notice was a flattery, even to her. And he was known as one who had little use for women, and a large contempt.

She had met him at dinner the night before, for the first time. He had sat at her left hand. He had talked most of the time. Brilliant talk, which she had done her best to follow, and to hold on its own level. She had been pleasantly conscious that he had admired her, as all men should—as most men did. But he had been nothing to her.

But she knew that he had been speaking at the House of Commons this afternoon. As head of the Institute of Chemical Research, he had *ex officio* seats in both Houses of Lords and Commons, without the indignity of seeking the suffrages of the mob. He and his brother scientists had controlling votes in both Houses on all matters on which only the specialist was competent to decide. It was the age of the specialist. There were few national questions on which he had not the final word. He held no exalted office, having the reality of power, and being able to despise its protestations. There was no limit to his wealth. He was one of the three men who shared the secret of the transmutation of metals, which they withheld, for the world's good. But he had other knowledge, which he used,

or licensed, on his own terms. The world had come to the era when knowledge was power indeed.

"Lady Joselyn," he said, "I suppose you know that you are a very beautiful woman."

She was not prepared to dispute that. She knew it to be a very general opinion, with which she concurred. She said nothing, but her eyes fell. She was conscious of this and ashamed that she could not face him more easily.

He went on. "A *very* beautiful woman. That is why I am here. I have only time for the best. You will come to my house to-morrow night at twelve-thirty. You will enter an automatic brougham at the corner of Berners Street at twelve-fifteen. You will be home by three a.m., which is earlier than you often are."

"Of course," she said steadily, "I will do nothing of the kind. I think you are mad."

"You will do just what I have said," he answered coolly. "You had better not touch that bell, or you will be sorry. Anyway, it would make no difference. Do you suppose your aunt would be rash enough to oppose me? . . . You are a very fortunate woman. . . . I intend that you shall have a child with rather more brains than yourself. If a theory is right of which I have little doubt, you will have a son. . . . In three weeks' time, you can marry that young fool you have just left."

"Then," she said, and her voice was so steady and her eyes so quiet that even he could not tell what she was thinking, "this is not exactly an offer of marriage?"

He smiled at that. He thought she was taking it well, at which he was pleased. He had found that there was seldom trouble with the older women. They saw sense. He had so much to give. They had so much to fear. But the young girls were uncertain. They were very easy, or very difficult. There had been scenes; but they had not mattered in the end. Know-

ledge is power. And this girl he meant to have, though the heavens fell.

"Marriage? . . . Of course not. Why should I want you about the house all the time? I have got servants for that."

"Well," she said, striving with half success to give a lightness to her tone which she did not feel, "it would be all the same, whether or not."

"You mean," he said, without sign of resentment or affectation of misunderstanding, "to refuse?"

"Of course I do. You may be a great man, Professor Cawstin, but you have made a mistake."

"No, Lady Joselyn," he answered, "I don't make mistakes."

"You have made one this time. You have had more than ten minutes now. I think we had better go."

"Not till you understand. I don't threaten. I only suggest. Suppose your father should die? . . ."

She looked bewildered for a moment, and then sprang to her feet with a bloodless face, as his meaning reached her.

"You would never do such a dreadful thing! . . . I know," she went on falteringly, "that you scientists have wonderful powers. Everyone knows that. But you wouldn't use them in such a way! . . . Besides, it would be no good, if you did. . . . My father would rather die."

"But," he added reasonably, "it would be no gain to you if he did . . . you would still have to come."

She had lost her fear now and faced him with a contemptuous anger which he regarded with scientific interest and appreciation. Yes, she was a very beautiful woman. He admired his selection.

"You may kill me," she was saying, "but I never will."

"Oh no," he said, "I shouldn't do that. Perhaps a skin disease on the face, that you would come to me to cure when it reached the eyes. . . . But I never threaten. I only suggest. . . . And I haven't suggested anything *really* bad. Not to what I might."

Her courage faltered before the remorseless confidence that confronted her. "Professor Cawstin," she said piteously, "I can't really mean much to you. Can't you be generous? You can't understand how I feel. . . . What it means to me. . . . You've got all the world. . . . You can't really love me, or you wouldn't frighten me like this."

The Professor answered her with brutal frankness. "I don't love you at all. I think you're no better than a fool. I think you're a very beautiful girl, with about the best figure that I ever saw, and you'll breed well. I don't make mistakes. . . . You'll know how silly you've been," he added, in a kinder tone, "when you look back. You may feel a bit nervous beforehand, but you'll be glad enough afterwards. . . . But you'll have to remember this. There'll be no coming again. I never have the same woman twice. Life's too short for that. . . . But I know how to deal with a girl like you, to give you a good time. . . . So we'll have no more talk now. I've wasted nearly half an hour here, and your boy friend's probably round the door. . . . It's to be twelve-fifteen at the corner of Berners Street. An automatic brougham, with A.V. on the panel. Never mind what that means. You'll be back at three a.m., and no one will ever know. *My people don't talk.*"

He was turning to the door when she stopped him in a last effort to gain at least some delay—some time for thought, for decision, perhaps to think out some fresh appeal.

"Not to-morrow night!" she said, "not that, anyway; perhaps next week."

He asked a question, at which she flushed angrily, but did not answer.

"Nonsense," he said, "there's no better time than now. You ought to be glad of the chance."

He slid the door back as he spoke and went out without exacting a promise, and it increased her terror. He was so sure of his power.

The next day Joselyn kept to her own room, cancelling her engagements of the day, and then disconnecting her photophone, and instructing her maid that she was to be left undisturbed till evening.

She wanted to think. She must think. And thought brought no comfort, and no decision. . . . She would never, never. . . . Would it really be such a very terrible thing, being so compelled, so trapped, in such a dreadful power? . . . She would never be so coerced, so degraded. She would not go. . . . Dare she refuse? . . . She knew that she had not listened to unmeaning threats. . . . If he had said that he loved her, it would be different—at least, a little. If she had not loved Selwyn, as she now knew that she did—knew it so much more clearly, more passionately, under the shadow of this experience. Selwyn, who loved her. She knew that also now. The knowledge had come to both of them after that moment of tension, when she had refused to tell him anything that had passed with Cawstin, though she had not been able entirely to conceal her trouble.

No, she never would. She would rather kill herself than that. But would she, really? She had seen death. She had seen burial. The grave is cold for the young. She did not want to die. She wanted Selwyn. Death was no way to him. . . . She stood before the mirror, slim, and bare, and beautiful. She fancied that his touch was upon her, and her shoulder shrank suddenly aside. Those hateful hairy hands. He had said that she would have his child. She shrank inwardly as though her body were polluted. She thought of it as a disfigured thing. Selwyn's child would not disfigure it. She would be so proud—so glad.

Could she always conceal it, if this thing must be? Would Selwyn never know? Would she have no weak moment of confession, such as may be regretted afterwards but can never be changed again? . . . But such thoughts were idle, for it

was a thing that she would not do. . . . *Never, never, never, so help her, God!* But there was no God. Everyone knew that. There was just Science and Law. Just those, and some foolish atavistic instincts and superstitions, such as vexed her now.

She must try to be reasonable. After all, it was for not more than two or three generations that reason had ruled the world. She remembered the superstition that her grandmother had practised, and in which she had professed belief. She would open her Bible with a random hand, and be guided by the text on which her eyes should fall. You could not easily think of a sillier thing than that. . . . Yet she was tempted to try. . . . She was tempted to do anything, however foolish, which would give guidance when she could find none in the counsel of her own heart.

There was a little shelf of books against the wall. Not for reading. The printed book was an obsolete curiosity now. They were inherited books of a sentimental interest, of ornamental value only. Among them was the actual Bible that her grandmother had used and, at the last, had given her.

It was a silly thing, but it could do no harm to try. . . . If she did it, she would do it as it should be done. She knew that the book must be opened with averted eyes, so that there should be no subconscious choice of Old Testament or of New. . . . That she must look once, and once only—must attempt no second appeal. . . .

She put the thought aside. She had no time, at least no heart, for trifling. Her trouble was too real, too near, for such absurdity. . . . Yet the thought returned. She would just do it, knowing that it could have no meaning, and get it over. It could do no harm to try. . . .

Joselyn read the words, and her face paled. It seemed to her that there could be no chance in that. But there was no guidance either. *This night thy soul shall be required of thee.* Not her body. Not her life. Did it mean that she was to lose

her soul? And what did the loss of a soul mean? She had learnt many things, but her education had taught her nothing of that.

You can think of them as you will, but they were very terrible words. . . . And while she thought of them she began to get ready to go. Her mind was still undecided whether to resist or to yield. She might try to destroy her persecutor. She had thought of that many times during the day, though with little comfort in the thought. She had no practice in homicide, and little confidence in her ability to overcome such an adversary. She felt that he would have taken his own precautions even against that. Nor could she tell how she might be able to escape; nor what consequences might follow. It would not be like an ordinary murder. Professor Cawstin was a man apart.

There has been a time, in the earlier part of the century, when the world had awakened to the fact that the advances in scientific knowledge threatened the destruction of the race—were even putting the power of that destruction into any ignorant or criminal hand which might be disposed to use it. . . . The scientists had replied that the pursuit of knowledge could not be stayed, but that the remedy lay in restricting the circulation of that which would be dangerous in unworthy hands. Laws had been passed to this end, and in twenty years they had borne such fruit that the scientists had become a caste who were above the obligations of their fellows and beyond their laws. They had resurrected a forgotten tongue, which only the elect among them were allowed to learn, and in which their records were kept. No one had more than a vague conception of what their knowledge had become, or the power it gave them. So they ruled by a great fear.

Joselyn did not know what had decided her to go. The words had been like a Delphic oracle. They were pregnant with a meaning which she could not read. She was no more disposed

to yield than she had been before. Perhaps less. But she had been overcome by a mood of fatalism. She went without thought, almost without emotion, to see what she should find. So she came to the corner of Berners Street.

She reached that spot just as the clock had struck the quarter, and as she approached she saw the brougham for which she had been told to look glide to the kerb and stop.

She stood for a moment, as in a dazed uncertainty, and then opened the door and got in. She sank back into the comfort of its silken interior, as it started in response to her entrance. She had a vague wish that some sudden accident might destroy it and her together. She could not bring herself to lift a hand against her own life, but she felt that she could have welcomed death from some assaulting evil. But there were no accidents now.

The brougham ran swiftly and smoothly on, only slackening at times sufficiently to avoid contact with some contiguous vehicle. Its course had been so set as to carry her accurately to the appointed place; its controls, and those of the other vehicles among which it moved, would maintain sufficient distance to avoid collision, and were held off by the same power at least three inches from the kerbs it passed.

The pavement was only dimly lighted, for the automatic cars of the period required no guidance, and pedestrianism, though no longer a penal offence, as it had been fifteen years earlier, was not encouraged in the London streets. As the brougham slid smoothly to the kerb, a footman came forward to open the door. She was within the house in a moment, and the car, as it felt the loss of her weight, was already gliding away to its garage.

There was a cold severity in the aspect of the sage-green passage through which she was being led by a female servant, with an expressionless face and an air of unemotional efficiency; but the thickest carpet would have been less soft

than was the smooth-faced material on which she trod, for comfort still remained, though art had fallen with the disorders and freedoms of life on which it thrives.

The woman led the way through a curtained door, and then turned to withdraw, saying: "There is food here and everything you will need. There is some wine, but not much. The Professor said you were not to have much of that. He will want you in twenty minutes in the farther room. You will go through that door. He said you were not to be later than that. You will leave your clothes here."

Saying this, she went at once, not inviting reply.

There was a small, old-fashioned clock on the wall, which ticked audibly. Joselyn watched it dumbly, as the minutes passed, standing as she had entered. She did not look at the food. She did not even throw off the white fur with which she had covered her shoulders as she had crossed the frosty street from the heated brougham to the heated hall. Her eyes were hard with a new anger, and, as is the way of women, she weighed the small thing and the great in different scales, so that they became equal, if not reversed. Every inexperienced instinct in mind and body resented the impersonal brutality of this reception.

And as she stood thus her resolution hardened. She would not do it. She would know how to protect herself. She looked round for a weapon, but she did not see it. People did not cut their food with knives on the table in the later half of the twentieth century. . . . Anyway, weapon or none, she could protect herself. She would not go through that door, as though she were a slave for his bidding. She would await him here.

It was nearly half an hour now. Would he never come? She felt that she would have the courage to meet him now, but she did not think it would last. Would it not be better to go forward and face him where she supposed that he must be, waiting beyond that dreadful door? But she could not do that.

Her courage was of the passive kind, that can meet but cannot provoke.

She could not stand there for ever. She had been a coward to come. She would go back now and face what to-morrow brought, as best she might.

She went to the door, but it would not open. There was no handle on the inside.

She did not waste herself in a useless effort. She might have known she was trapped. No wonder that there had been no sign. He could afford to wait. Better, in fact, than she. For the more time she wasted there, she supposed vaguely that the later it would be before he would let her go.

Well, she would waste no more time. Having come at all, it was an ignominious thing to stand there as she did. What must be must. She would face this thing that required her soul to-night. To her life's end she would ask herself what she had meant to do as she crossed to the farther door, and would find no answer.

Only, as she did so, she saw the whiteness of her face in a mirror upon the wall. She saw the glossy blackness of her head against its background of snowy fur, and for the first time in her life its beauty gave her no joy. She threw the fur from her neck, opened the door, and stepped into the room beyond.

And then she saw he was dead.

There was an after-difference in her memory of that night, in that while every feature of the commonplace ante-room in which she had waited was impressed upon her, so that she could have described it to the smallest detail, she could draw from the well of memory no clear impression of the exotic viciousness of the larger one into which she came, with its sensuous perfumes of ten thousand flowers. She saw nothing but the dead man.

From the first moment she did not doubt he was dead. She

would never fear him again. She went across the room, straight forward to where he lay. The resilient floor sloped very slightly downward from every side, and in the centre there was a hollow, saucer-shaped, of a width of about eight feet, which had been filled to heaping with tropic flowers, and which she passed unheeding. They were forest flowers of Brazil, gathered that morning, doubtless at his order, and brought here by a speeding plane.

There was another door at the farther side of the room. Near this door, on the right-hand of one who entered, there was a depression in the sloping floor, very shallow, into which a fountain played, and which was filled with water continually. There was nothing strange in that. Every important heated room in the great houses of the time had such a fountain of ice-cooled water. They were as common as had been the grates of an earlier century. They were seldom more than three inches deep. They were sometimes fenced, in different ornamental ways. But not always. Not in such rooms as this.

He lay with his head in this shallow pool, and so that the fountain played upon it, and the water splashed continually to the floor beyond. She thought at first that he had slipped and fallen, and had been suffocated by the sparkling water that was around his mouth. But his face was swollen, a congested purple, and the hands she hated, the hands that she had feared to feel upon her, were of an unnatural size.

It was plain enough. He had lifted an armful of the flowers—perhaps for the perfume that they gave, perhaps only to confirm their freshness, to be satisfied that his order had been well served. And the little snake was still twisted around his wrist.

Joselyn was not afraid now. She had no fear of the dead man. No fear, even, of that thin, black-speckled band of yellow-green that braceleted the hairy wrist, and was as quiet as death itself.

But she must think. She saw that there would be time for

thought. He would have given orders that he should not be disturbed in the thing that he had meant to do. She could not tell what would happen if this were discovered while she was still there, nor what sinister construction might be placed upon it. But she thought that she would be safe if she could once get clear of the house, if she could leave as quietly as she had come. Yet it might create suspicion, even inquiry, if she should attempt to leave too soon.

So she stood there, as silent and unmotioned as she had done in the other room. For she could not take her eyes from the snake. She felt that if she withdrew them, and looked again, it might have disappeared. To where? She did not know how quickly it could move. She kept her eyes on the snake.

She could not go back by the way she came. She knew that way was closed. She must use the one by which he had entered, and find her way to the exit as best she might. And she found that this was easy to do. Meeting no one, she went by stairs and passages that were silent-floored, till she came to the outer door. . . . And it was just then that she remembered that she had left her fur.

She did not analyse the instinct, but it seemed to her of a supreme importance for her own safety that she should leave no material evidence that she had been there that night. And there was her monomark on the fur.

Now she felt that, so near to safety, with the door offering to her hand, she could not risk return. Yet, trembling now, she went back.

No one met her as she did this. She passed the dead man. The snake was still on his wrist. It seemed asleep. She went on to the farther room and picked up the fur. As she went out at last, closing the door for ever upon the sight of the dead, the woman met her whom she had seen before. Joselyn wondered for a moment whether she must not have seen the sprawling body as the door moved.

But it was evident that she had not done so. She gave Joselyn a dull yet inquisitive glance, the meaning of which she could not read.

The woman led her silently by the way that she had already learnt. She passed out into the cold mist of the winter night, and entered the vehicle which was waiting for her again.

She sank back into the softness of that cushioned interior, and knew that she was trembling violently, now that the need of self-control was over, and the danger past.

This night thy soul. . . . It had been a message indeed, though it had not been meant for her.

Knowledge had triumphed, and the old faith was dead. She knew that. It proved its power in a hundred complications of life, in a thousand tyrannies. Men had told their Creator to stand aside while they took more competent control, and He had made no protest at all. Or no protest that they could hear. Perhaps He could speak an unknown language too.

When she was back in the familiar security of her own softly-lighted room courage came again, and the consciousness of a great joy.

She got into bed, but she did not feel tired at all. She reached for the photophone and called Belle Templeton. When she knew that she was alone, she adjusted the instrument, so that Belle could see her while they talked.

"Belle," she said, "I'm going to marry Selwyn. When? *Now.*" Belle said she was glad. But she recognised a note of anxiety, of inquiry, underlying the tone in which her friend replied. Did Belle suspect? Did Belle *know*? Had Belle herself . . . ? Anyway, she could trust Belle. She would like someone to know. "Wait a moment," she said, "I've got something to show you."

She adjusted the instrument again so that it could convey the vision of anything which should be pictured in her own mind. She said nothing, but Belle saw her alight from the automatic

brougham and go up the steps, the footman leading. Belle saw every detail of the room in which the clock ticked and the hands moved on. She could not see much of the room beyond. It was blurred, except just where the dead man lay. (But she knew that room.) The man was very clear, and so was the thin, little band, black-speckled, of yellow-green, that was around his wrist.

"So that's that," said Joselyn very happily as the picture ended. Belle said she was glad.

"And I'm going to cut you off," Joselyn added. "I want Selwyn now."

"You're not going to tell him that?"

"No, of course. I've got more important things to say to him. Much!" Belle found that she was cut off.

"That you, Selwyn? Alone? So I supposed at this hour. You didn't take long to wake, I'll say that. Got the lights on? Well, you can see me here, if you like." Her hand moved among the studs. "Listen, Selwyn. You're in luck. I'm going to marry you now. Yes, *now*. Don't I always mean what I say? *Now*. While we're safe. Never mind what I mean by that. Probably nothing at all. Girls never do. You'll go now and get the marriage registered, which won't take more than ten minutes, and come straight up. . . . Yes, I should just think you would!"

She disconnected before he could answer further, turned over and went to sleep.

After all, it wasn't such a bad night.

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Brain

PROFESSOR BRISKET, President of the first Scientist government, sat in his new Studio of Contemplation, one morning in the early spring of 1990, considering the possibilities of the unprecedented power which the advance of knowledge, and the events of the last year, had placed in his somewhat bony hands.

It was six months since the suppression of the rebellion of 1989, in which the last traditions of barbarism had gone down, drowned in the blood of millions.

It was a crisis which had been inevitable for fifty years, though there were few who had foreseen, even a year ago, how near it was, and how decisive it must be.

A year ago, in spite of the changes and developments of half a century, the grotesque custom had persisted which decided the government of the country by the equal votes of its adult inhabitants, there being no distinction between youth and age, between folly and wisdom, between knowledge and ignorance—not even the simplest distinction between the cranial capacities of the voters, no disability being recognised except that of certified lunacy, or definite conviction of criminality. It was scarcely more than fifty years since there had been the grotesque spectacle of an eminent scientist being summoned before a magistrate, with no University qualifications whatever, to account for the possession of a stolen dog, and for the uses to which he had put it.

Since then, scientific knowledge had been powerful enough to influence successive governments, in spite of the comic method of their appointment, in ways which had brought incalculable benefits to mankind.

And then (as the obstinate mule had died just as it had been

successfully reduced to the daily diet of a single straw), from one absurd triviality, the whole country had leapt into a sudden flame of war, with all its horrors.

It was a woman, as usual, who was the first cause of the crisis. A woman who had been fond of turnips. A woman with an infatuated husband, who had actually grown them for her, on a strip of hidden land behind his dwelling, in excess of the regulated dietary, and in contempt of the balance of vitamins on which their health, if not their lives, depended.

Worse than that, after the crime had been detected and punished, mildly enough, by the painless amputation of his left ear, he had contumaciously repeated the offence, attempting to grow the forbidden vegetable in an unoccupied cellar.

Being again detected, and knowing that he could hope for no further mercy, he had resisted arrest with such violence that his captors had brought him to the dock with broken heads, and one of them having a damaged mouth, and a denture smashed beyond remedy.

There had been no demonstration at the trial, of which there had been no public report (which was prohibited for certain of the grosser forms of obscenity), and there had been no sign of previous agitation to forecast the riot which had demolished the vehicle intended to convey him to the port of banishment, and rescued him from it.

A week later, the city of Nottingham, in which the incident had occurred, was in a state of open rebellion, refusing to surrender the culprit, and demanding repeal of the legislation which had occasioned the trouble.

And then, while the government hesitated and temporised, using such intermittent severities as exasperated without suppressing a revolt which threatened to spread from the midland to the northern counties, Professor Brisket, until then only known as holding the chair of Homology at the London University, had called a conference of twenty of the leading

scientists, and, three days later, it was announced to an astounded world that the Government had resigned, and that the Council of Twenty-One had assumed responsibility for the control of the country.

Open war followed. War that was fierce, and short, and sanguinary. The usurpation was resisted by nine-tenths of the population, including almost the whole of its (comparatively) illiterate, its political, its religious, and the majority of its literary and journalistic elements. But the scientists and their followers, banding in instant opposition to the forces of prejudice and reaction, opposed a hundred devices, secret, subtle, and deadly, to the crude violence of high-explosive, and the vain defences of trench and steel.

The proletariat fought with the obsolete weapons with which they had been furnished by the subservient scientists of an earlier century; the scientists retaliated with a variety of deaths, insanities and diseases, of which the origin was often indiscoverable, and from which there was no defence, nor any road of escape which would be found by those upon whom they fell.

Yet so bitter was the enmity which had leapt to light from the tiny spark which had kindled it, so hopeless did the rebels feel that their fate would be, should they resign themselves to submission; so sure, on the other hand, were the ranks of the scientists that they fought for all the possibilities of the mind of man, and that failure would frustrate all their work, and lead the world backward, even to the monkey twilight of their aboriginal ancestors, that it seemed for a time that extermination only would be sufficient to decide its issue.

The rebels had been encouraged, almost at the first, by the defection of one of the leading scientists of the day, Dr. Shercliff Binyon, whose teaching had always been of a heretical kind, as he had held that, while the pursuit of knowledge is among the noblest occupations of the human mind, the idea that the created can be equal, by the application of such know-

ledge, to taking the part of the Creator was a presumptuous folly which could only end in such disaster as would revert the world to an elementary barbarism. He had even suggested that this result, and the recurrence of such results, might be the Divine method by which the earth was continually refitted for its purpose as a training-ground for the spirit of man.

But his support, however morally important, had had little practical result beyond the momentary heartening of the rebels, for his learning was not of a kind which could be used for the discomfiture of their enemies; and the scientists, infuriated by the unexpected stubbornness of the resistance which they encountered, and by the desertion of one of their own body, decided to strike with a severity which would end the conflict.

When Professor Brisket had given the members of the previous government an ultimatum of two hours to resign their offices, it had been with a warning that, should they refuse or hesitate, they would be smitten by a disease which would render them pestilent beyond endurance of any human associates.

Now he had warned the champions of ignorance and reaction that, unless there should be surrender, absolute and abject, within twelve hours, they would learn, in the desolation of a city, the irresistible powers which they had defied so vainly.

The rebels had replied by marshalling a cloud of fighting planes, which held the air from Southampton to Lowestoft in one unbroken line of heroic purpose, and by the up-thrown mouths of ten thousand anti-aircraft guns. But the planes had held their line unchallenged, and the guns had remained silent. Only, when the next morning came, Bristol had ceased to be. It had dissolved into air or ground before a chemical agent so powerful, so silent, and so swift that no sound disturbed the serenity of the surrounding country, no light of ruin flickered over the Channel waters. Simply, the city lights went out.

Simply, the ground where once the city stood showed bare and burnt, and of a somewhat crocus aspect purple and yellow-streaked when the dawn found it. But of the city that had been, of life or building or garden, even of Clifton Bridge, there was no trace at all.

After that, there had been no more trouble.

Professor—now President—Brisket smiled silently, recalling the coincidence that Dr. Binyon had happened to be in the city which had been selected for the required example. His hesitations had ceased from troubling.

Power had come to the President, as it may never have come to any earlier potentate in the history of the world. There was only the Council of the Twenty-One, and to each of these he had allotted their appropriate occupations.

Seventeen of them would continue the conquest of knowledge, by the power of which the world lay at their feet already; and the whole Universe was yielding, one by one, its cryptic secrets to their insatiate importunities. Of the other three, two were occupied in executive work as his enthusiastic subordinates. There was no danger from them. Professor Borthin? Well, he was not immortal. There might be a vacancy on the Council of Twenty-One. It might be very soon.

The President sat in his star-domed Studio of Contemplation, over the aromatic darkness of which its vault of stars gave the impression of the depths of space, without the risk of rain or cold or tempest, so that he might think without any triviality of distraction, and with the vast realm always before him—the realm of blind, unchanging law which lay, in its vast unconsciousness, awaiting the control of the advancing minds of men.

The hours passed, and he did not move. He was facing the most momentous decision of his life. More gigantic in possi-

bilities, more fatal should his judgment err, than had been that which had established him as the head of the first purely scientific government that the earth had known.

It was three years ago that he had casually discovered, when his investigations were directed to quite other ends, the substance which stimulates the cerebral processes and controls the functioning of the brain. He had been cautious in its application, because the occasion of his discovery had suggested that its use might not be without danger to a mammalian subject, and an injection into a young dog had produced a condition of such uncontrollable ferocity as to be indistinguishable from actual madness.

A viper, receiving a small, and then a larger, injection, had shown no sign of any effect whatever. On receiving a third, it had died within a few hours.

The first real success had been with a minnow, one of five in a glass tank, to which he had given an infinitesimal injection. Two days afterwards, when he went to scatter their food on the water in the usual corner, he found that it was surrounded by a barrier of the floating weed which the tank contained, through which there was only one passage left, and that somewhat tortuous.

Through this passage the inoculated minnow darted swiftly, reaching the food sufficiently before its baffled companions to get the largest share of the meal.

He had disturbed the weed, and had found it rearranged on the next morning.

Disturbing it again, he had watched, and seen the fish actually tugging the floating weed to the required position.

After that, he had fed the fish on whatever part of the surface might be clear, lest the other four should be starved entirely.

Four days later, he had found three of them dead in the water, each with a wound behind the neck, the inoculated fish

having evidently decided that one companion would be sufficient for its requirements, and would allow it to eat its fill.

This experiment had shown that he had been right in his judgment as to the nature of the substance which he had isolated, and, learning this, he had destroyed the too-intelligent minnow, and burnt its body, these precautions being taken because he was not sure whether the acquired characteristic, being physical in its basis, might not be transmitted to a succeeding generation, nor even whether there might not be a possibility that it might be transmissible to another fish which might swallow one which had benefited from the inoculation. He had no wish to create a race of pike with approximately human cunning.

Since that time he had made some fresh discoveries as to the nature and effects of the secretion, and modifications in its preparation, which, he believed, would render it suitable for injection into the blood of the mammalia, and, specifically, into the human blood which was to be its ultimate destination.

But he had still much to learn as to its effects, and as to the dose which could be safely given, as to whether such effects were permanent, and concerning that most important question of whether it would be transmitted to the children of those who might benefit from it.

He had also perfected another injection, which could be relied upon to produce in those who received it a docility so great that all other passions or proclivities would be subdued by the desire to act at the call of duty, or to fulfil the wishes of those about them. On this latter preparation he relied with a reasonable confidence to control any unruly symptoms which might result from the major experiment.

Now he sat, in the artificial unchanging night of the studio, considering the conditions of his next experiment, and on whom or what it should be made.

It was a matter on which he had no confidant. It was a power too great to share. The time might come for its announcement, even for doling it out to others, in some lesser degree than his own benefit from it. It would make his dominance absolute. It would bring, no doubt, the worship which must be paid, sooner or later, to the Lord of Science who will control the world. But this time was not yet.

. . . At last, he rose, and passed out of the studio. His course was clearly determined. He summoned Wilkins, who superintended the scientific diet which had maintained his health so well, until he was now on the threshold of his eighty-second year.

"Wilkins," said the Premier, "I want you to speak to the farmer who supplies the eggs and milk for my own table. I want him to procure me a young sow-pig. The breed doesn't matter, and I will pay his price. But it must be healthy, intelligent, and good-tempered."

"Good-tempered, sir?"

"Yes, that's very important. It's not for the laboratory."

"No, sir?"

"No, I shall want two other pigs sent there. Two with good foreheads. I may want a look at their brains. But I want this one sent to Berkhamsted. I shall be going down on Tuesday. I know there are some good sties there; though we haven't used them. You can give instructions about the details."

He turned his attention to more immediate things.

The young sow came out eagerly at the splashing sound of the pig-wash. The abnormal activity of her brain had not resulted in any emaciation of her inferior organs, nor of the adipose tissues which have been so successfully cultivated by a thousand ancestral generations. She was still growing, and

the excitements of motherhood were yet before her. She was well-fed, sleek, and supple in movement; her rapid growth, and a restless activity somewhat infrequent in her kind, having delayed the more extreme corpulence for which her race is so justly famed.

She would have been outside her sleeping-compartment before the opening of the sty-door, and the tilt of the bucket, but that she did not wish to show any interest in the condition of the fastenings of that door, which she felt sure would be carefully examined. It was true that they were quite in order, but it would have been a needless ordeal to have met the suspicious glances of Billy Tedman, who regarded her with a mixture of fear and admiration which would have been insufficient to condone the delinquency of the early morning.

But what proof was there?

A brood of seven tiny goslings running through the dewy grass, towards the sanctuary of the coop three yards away, from which their mother stretched an anxious neck. Strong jaws that snapped five times—that snapped and swallowed—and two goslings only that tumbled clumsily over the wooden edge of the coop into the safety of the familiar straw.

No one had seen it. And Billy Tedman *knew* that the young sow could open the wooden latch of the sty-door, and that she was *always* to be found wandering loose should he omit to slide the lower bolt which had been added a few weeks ago—*knew* with equal certainty that she could not open that lower bolt, and that she was *never* found loose now, unless he should forget to slide it.

The five goslings had been only ten days old, and their fluffy bodies had done little to reduce the healthy appetite with which she plunged her snout into the creamy mess which had descended from Billy's bucket. Sharps are good, and skim-milk can be sucked up very pleasantly. But why, oh why, had

she been such a fool as to tell Professor Brisket that she liked barley-meal best?

Now she knew that, after she had enjoyed an hour of happy dozing in the straw of her sleeping-quarters, a panel would slide back in the farthest wall, and she would have to rise and go out into a covered yard, where the Professor and she would commune together for an uncertain period, during which she would have to reply to his questions with exasperating slowness—a slowness which was, however, often less exasperating than the fatuous questions themselves—by indicating successive letters from an alphabet which was neatly painted upon the ground between them.

She knew already that he was a slow-brained old fossil whose mind or eye would fail to follow her spelling if she quickened the motions of foot or snout, but she did not know why he had been foolish enough to discourage a simple suggestion that they should substitute a series of symbols for the more frequent words.

Here she erred, supposing him to be more stupid than he really was; the fact being that he only held the conversations at all to test the degree of intelligence with which he had endowed her, and that he intended her to go to the butcher immediately she had supplied him with a litter of young pigs which would enable him to judge the effects of his experiment upon the next generation.

Also, he destined her bacon for his own exclusive consumption, which would test the possibility of the transmission of this new brain-stimulus by the medium of eaten flesh. There must be tests also of the consumption of blood, of uncooked meat, particularly of uncooked brains. Professor Brisket would not have attained his present eminence had he not been careful and unhurried in his experiments.

His brain might be less agile, his perceptions slower, than those of the stimulated ganglia of his protagonist, but, from

the advantage of his greater knowledge, his longer experience, and his somewhat different personality (though this last difference should not be too generously assessed), he was able, not merely to conceal his ultimate purpose, but the impulses also that prompted the questions which seemed so foolish to his pachydermatous protégée, and the opinions which he formed upon them.

He had already made one observation, of the first importance. The improvement in the faculties and functioning of the brain which he had been able to induce did not result in any change in the nature of the individual who received advantage from them.

The sow did not forget the swill-trough to observe the stars.

It was the nature of her kind to be cunning, cowardly, and greedy, and these characteristics continued. She had improved, beyond his utmost anticipation, in memory, in power of deductive reasoning, in alertness of mental anticipation, but he had no reason to doubt that, if one of her children should be still-born, she would proceed to eat it, as her mother had done before her; he knew that she would answer his questions with diligence solely because she would get no barley-meal in the afternoon should she show any indisposition to do so.

On the day which we are now considering, the Professor brought to its intended climax a line of inquiry which he had been pursuing for a previous week, during which he had explained very frankly to this intelligent animal the nature of the relations which had existed between her race and his own for so long a period. He had done this with some curiosity, if not trepidation, as to the reactions which it would arouse in the mind of his auditor, and had not been without the protection of a lethal weapon of recent invention, very swift and deadly in its action, which had lain ready to his hand on the little table which divided her from him, on which

he was accustomed to make notes of the morning's conversations, and beyond which was the alphabet set in the ground, by which the young sow was enabled to reply to his questions, despite the deficiency in the construction of her vocal chords, which reduced the possibilities of oral intercourse.

But the animal had taken his explanation in a very sensible way.

She saw at once that it was natural that all creatures should eat each other as opportunity offered, and safety permitted. It was the only law of life which she would ever be likely to understand, even though her brain were stimulated a hundred-fold. She saw how greatly it was to the advantage of the young of her kind that they should receive (as it were) an insurance policy from the human race giving to each of them at the least a few months of happy carefree life, rather than that they should be exposed to the savage chances of the wilds, to precarious uncertainties of food and climate, and to the decimations of a hundred accidents. She saw at once that men would still have been able to kill pigs, had they done nothing to protect and cherish. When she learnt the almost incredible millions which are maintained in a princely indolence, she saw that the world was theirs, and that the greed and stupidity of mankind had been successfully exploited by the far-sighted cunning of her kind. When the professor explained that, though the majority of any litter might be destined to an early end, yet it frequently happened that the best among them would be selected to remain alive and continue the generations, and that she herself was one who had been so favoured, it seemed a particularly admirable arrangement, of which she approved most heartily.

The Professor was somewhat disconcerted by the certainty with which her mind perceived that the human race has made itself subservient to her own, until he recollected that she was a pig still, though she might be a very intelligent one, and

that her conclusions might naturally be influenced by this deficiency.

Professor Borthin, having no star-domed Studio of Contemplation in which to ponder, was pacing one of the longer corridors of Buckingham Palace. He was thirty-two, the youngest and most brilliant member of the Council of Twenty-One. A man of restless, drug-stimulated energy, he found that he could think best when his legs were moving.

He had a deep contempt for President Brisket, who had been allowed his position through the paltry claim of seniority (senility would have been a better word!) when it had been decided that the scientists should assert their power. What was Brisket? A sentimentalist. A dreamer. A man knowing no more mathematics than a nineteenth-century schoolgirl.

Even the occasion of the revolution had been an absurdity. What did it matter if women ate turnips? Or prussic acid? Most men and women were of no value, except for experimental purposes.

Now this brain-grafting. . . . He wanted a dozen babies of each sex, every month for a year, if the experiment were to be carried out with sufficient variations to make it interesting. Two or three hundred children's bodies growing up with the brains of dogs. . . . Two or three hundred bodies of dogs directed by the brains of children. It was fascinating in its possibilities. And some of the brains could be transferred back after a time. . . .

And the old fool had delayed permission! It was to be "discussed at the Council".

But there would be something else to be discussed at the Council. There would be a surprise for Brisket. . . . Or did he guess it? "*Space lying curved in the arms of Time.*" That had been his expression when he had been perorating at the

last meeting. Drivelling old fool! Did he not know that Space and Time is one and indissoluble?

He had spoken as though Time had pre-existed Space, and the heavy lids of Professor Sturmie's eyes had lifted for a moment, and surveyed him with a puzzled wonder. He didn't often show his ignorance in that assembly by talking outside the limits of his own Homology.

Even to the untrained mind to attempt imagination of Space without Time, or of Time without Space, should be enough to show its absurdity. Even Einstein's elementary speculations of sixty years ago had passed the bounds of such childishness.

He had roused Professor Sturmie to bring up the subject. Sturmie cared for no one, if his own subjects were left alone, but he had a gift of sarcasm which had made him dreaded in controversy. He could be trusted to make the President look the fool he was. And when that had happened, what influence would he have left?

After that episode, he would ask for an order for the children he needed. If it were refused . . . ? He would claim a vote. It was the kind of point on which he would be sure to get it.

Then he would suggest the propriety of resignation. Probably, after that, there would be swift deaths on the Council. Well, if so, he had his own secret powers. He would not be unready. . . .

Ten years ago Queen Hermione had presented Buckingham Palace to the nation (perhaps not very willingly) as a home for South American monkeys whose gland-extractions were required to increase the virility of members of the House of Commons.

Professor Borthin ceased his activities in the corridor. He went to look at the monkeys.

The silent occupant of the Studio of Contemplation was not unaware of his danger.

He had regretted that florescence of oratory the moment that he had met the sardonic glance of Professor Sturmie's heavy eyes, as they had been lifted towards him.

Professor Sturmie seldom looked, or spoke, or voted.

His attendants wheeled his chair into position at the Council table, and he sat there, his hands motionless before him, his face a blank passivity, till the proceedings ended.

But he was held in a very great respect. He was supposed to know more on each of his colleagues' subjects than they knew themselves.

Twenty years ago as Principal of the Birmingham University, it had become known that, in case of sudden indisposition, he could take the place of any of his professors, and lecture brilliantly on their own subjects at a moment's notice. There had been plots to test this capacity, but he had always been equal to them.

If he should now be roused to attack the intellectual eminence of the President, that gentleman knew that the assault could be delivered from no deadlier quarter.

He knew that there were other members of the Council whose knowledge both of Physics and Mathematics was greater than his own. There was nothing in that. Each man specialised, and was supreme in his own dominion. But he was not expected to talk dogmatic fallacies upon his neighbours' subjects. And the position of a President was different from that of others. He, of all men, must not be open to ridicule.

But, after all, it had only hastened the conflict, which was inevitable. Borthin meant to rule and the difference was not of men only. It was one of fundamental principles. Professor Brisket had never been known as a sentimentalist. He would pour human blood on the altars of Science as readily as he would have sacrificed a mangel-wurzel. He had not hesitated to give the order which had evaporated Bristol. But he

believed, in a vague way, that all he did was for the Higher Good of Humanity.

Professor Borthin had no such illusion, and no such object. For the Higher Good of Humanity he did not care a bean. He worshipped Science for its own sake, and it was its own justification.

To him, President Brisket was a sentimentalist, and an obstruction, and the time had come to remove him.

The two men were thus of one mind as to the necessity for removing the other. They were united in decision that the time had come. They were agreed as to the time and place of the conflict. They were alike in thinking that the first step must be to discredit the adversary before the Council. They only differed in the fact that the younger man was the attacker, that he fought from a less vulnerable situation, and that he was confident of success, whereas his older and more cautious opponent was aware of being forced to give battle on ground which he had not chosen, and was very far from comfortable as to the defence he could offer, or the strength of the counter-attack which he must be prepared to deliver. . . .

And yet his mind held to the point that Space and Time were *not* identical. They were not merely two aspects of one quality. There was an absolute difference. But how could he prove it in a way which would convince the Council, and confound his opponents? Of the difference he was convinced. Of his own random metaphor—of the pre-existence of Time—he was much less confident.

He reflected that Space is motionless. It remains. It must have been—always. Full or empty, it *must* have been there. Timeless, perhaps, but *there*. Was this not the very opposite of the idea which he had advanced so randomly?

Must have been, if it had no conscious occupants? Yes, surely.

Then how about Time? A condition of Time of which

there had never been, nor would be, conscious knowledge vexed his mind with a lack of reality. He was less sure.

Supposing that there were two separate realms of consciousness, not adjoining. Would not the unconscious interval be a Space, although it had no conscious occupant? Was it so in itself, or was it made such by the facts of the conscious realms which were contiguous to it? But he had first postulated that Space. . . . He became aware that he was speculating vaguely, whereas the thoughts of Professor Sturmie on such a subject would be clear and sure, and his words decisive.

It was not thus that he would be armed for conquest. He must be prepared not only to resist, but to rout with a returning ridicule. He could not afford to fail. He could not even afford an indecisive contest.

If his brain were stimulated. . . . He saw that the time had come to call in the aid of the unsuspected power which he held reserved. Surely, after all his experiments . . . ? He would try an infinitesimal dose at first, and then a larger one, when he had experienced its effects.

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It was about half an hour before he felt the effect of the injection. Then he became aware of an increased clarity of vision, by which the minor details of the objects around him, which he had previously overlooked, were thrown into a vivid prominence. Then he was conscious of a new mental energy, and a quickened perception of abstract things. It was absurd that he should have been troubled by the sluggish cerebrations of Professor Sturmie, who had a mind that floundered like a hippopotamus. And the problem itself was of a childish simplicity. Quiescent Space could have no Time at all. Therefore they could not be identical.

Space must be invaded by Energy: then Time was needed for its operation. Time commenced with its own occasion.

That was the sequence. Space must first exist. Then there

must be the invasion of Energy. Then there must be Time for its operations.

So far he saw—or thought he saw—very clearly. But there was something further. Something behind, and beyond, of which his mind was aware, but which it could not reach. Something that vexed and baffled, like a half-faded dream. Something which, could he grasp it, would bring conviction to all who heard, and confound his opponents with a swift derision.

He saw that he would need a further injection before he would be able to overwhelm his enemies. With the experience which he had gained, he no longer feared it. He resolved to take the Council into a partial confidence. He would tell them of the discovery he had made. He would take a further injection before their eyes. He would discourse upon it for half an hour, telling of the experiments which he had made already—telling everything but the formula itself—offering to share his discovery with his colleagues, and to confine it to them, so that, even among their fellow-scientists, they would be assured of a continued supremacy.

Meanwhile, the injection would operate in him, and would demonstrate the miracle which he had achieved.

After that, he would know how to deal with Borthin, even with Sturmie, should they dare to attack him. Should they be silent, he would also deal with them, quickly and quietly, after the Council had risen.

Meanwhile, he could put the question from his mind entirely. He was disposed to experiment with the second preparation, to ascertain its effects upon those who had been exhilarated by the first already. Not, of course, upon himself. He went to the laboratory, filled a syringe, and went down to the pig-sty.

He entered it by the sliding door, at the back of the sleeping-compartment. The sow, sprawled in clean straw, after a heavy

lunch of her beloved barley-meal, was snoring happily. He applied the syringe behind her ear, and gave her an ample dose. The ear flicked, as though a fly had vexed it, but the sow did not waken.

President Brisket was not lacking in self-control, and there were probably few men who were less under the domination of the physical. Yet he had developed certain habits of which he vaguely disapproved, and against which he fought a desultory battle, in which he was never decisively victorious.

Among these habits was one of muttering to himself, more or less audibly, when he imagined himself to be alone, and sometimes even when those were present before whom a firmer restraint was desirable.

It was unfortunate for himself, and of momentous consequence to the world, that he had been particularly injudicious on more than one occasion when he had been lost in thought, sitting at the table, or pacing the private yard, after he had finished one of his instructive interviews with the animal intelligence that he had stimulated, and after the sow had retired to her own quarters. With all his wisdom, he had not considered that the hearing of a sow is more acute than that of a man, and that the alertness of the senses of this particular animal rendered the closing of the partition a useless obstacle to the hearing of the words which he subsequently muttered, however indistinctly.

It followed that the animal had been able to supplement the information which he thought well to give her with a knowledge of the preparations he was using, and of his hopes and plans, which he would have found were disconcerting had he been aware of this development, and still more so had he suspected the conclusions to which they had led her.

As we have remarked already, although she had become a pig of very exceptional intelligence, she was a pig still. She

was not concerned with the stars, nor with the good of humanity, nor with the pursuit of science, nor even with the good of her own kind. She was concerned solely and entirely with her own physical welfare. Because she had learnt of the general destiny of pigs without resentment, it did not follow that she was willing to feel a knife in her own neck. Rather, she recognised that this was the one problem with which it was essential that she should deal successfully. It did not appear that it was of an immediate urgency, but it was of an overwhelming importance.

When the self-communings of the President had informed her of the nature of the cultures which he had produced, and of his intentions concerning them, she had seen at once that her ultimate hope must lie in the second of these preparations, which, administered at the right time, and to the right individual, could hardly fail to direct his mind to a universal benevolence, from which she would benefit, in common with all the other creatures around him.

But she was too clear-sighted to minimise the difficulties of such a programme. She was aware of her physical limitations, and she felt no assurance, even should she be able to obtain and secrete some of the drug or culture in question (she was not very clear as to its exact nature), that the final assault upon herself would give her an opportunity of using it successfully.

She was, as we know, a very sensible animal, and she could not imagine a murderous-minded butcher, who might be short either of time or temper, delaying operations at her request, so that she might give him an injection in the right arm.

Beyond that, the mutterings of President Brisket had left her in doubt as to how soon the injection would take effect, and it is obvious that time would be of vital importance under such conditions as she had imagined.

She had a very practical mind, and it would have been no

consolation to her to know that a repentant butcher would wreath her corpse with flowers.

Finally, she had decided that her best hope lay in causing the President to take a sufficient dose of the second preparation to cause him to become of an overwhelming amiability, in which case the beneficence of his disposition could hardly fail to favour one who had been brought into such close and intellectually intimate relations with him.

That, at least, seemed her best hope, and she had now been watching for some weeks for an opportunity of putting into operation the simple but audacious plan by which she hoped to insure her safety.

This plan was to penetrate into the President's laboratory, and so to mix or interchange the cultures as to insure that when, as she had learnt from his own lips that he intended, he should aim to inoculate himself with the first, he should actually take an injection of the second.

But in this enterprise she could not afford to fail, and as she did not consider it urgent, she had delayed for choice of opportunity, until, as we have seen, President Brisket had already commenced the process of brain-stimulation which it was her object to complicate.

She went first into the outer sty, to observe the position of the sun, from which she was able to estimate the time—about three hours—which would elapse before her snout would sink suckingly into the ecstasy of the evening meal. Then she returned, somewhat uncertainly, to the inner sty. She had a vague impulse of beneficence, such as she had never known before, causing her to feel that her time was wasted unless she were doing good to someone.

Someone certainly included herself. When she remembered the project that had recently possessed her mind, it had acquired an even greater importance than it had had pre-

viously. She observed that the absent-minded President had failed to close the sliding hatch from which he had entered to disturb her sleep so momentarily.

She knew that she had only to cross the yard to gain the stairway door through which he was accustomed to descend upon her. She did not suppose that it would be locked, and there were few forms of latch which she had not learnt to manipulate. . . .

It would be little consonant with a narrative of such events as those that we are now approaching to give a detailed observation to the movements of a domestic pig, however intelligent.

It is sufficient to say that she must have succeeded in her purpose, which is not entirely surprising when her abnormal intelligence is considered, together with the fact that she was impulsed by an altruistic exaltation of mind, induced by the last injection she had received, and very foreign to her natural propensities, and, finally, that she was equipped by nature with a highly-sensitive snout, capable, even with the less intelligent of her kind, of operations of almost manual dexterity, and to which feet and teeth could give very useful support at need.

But it is evident, from the sequel, that she must have found some human or mechanical obstacle, such as that of a closed door, which prevented her return to her sty by the direct way when she had completed her enterprise; for we next observe her in Berkhamsted High Street, where she was brought up short by encountering a certain carpenter, a Mr. Jubbins, who turned suddenly from a side-street, with his bag of tools on his shoulder.

It is evident that the carpenter must have been fond of pork (or perhaps bacon is indicated), and that the sight of this sleek-sided specimen of her kind must have awakened certain acquisitive, if not actually gluttonous, instincts in a corrupt mind, which must have communicated themselves to an animal in which the drug was still working most potently, so that

it had become an uncontrollable impulse to gratify the desires of those among whom she moved.

"Can you direct me," she inquired fatuously, *"to a really good butcher?"*

We know that her articulation of human speech was not clear, but Mr. Jubbins seems to have caught her meaning immediately.

"Come this way," he said genially, with a persuasive hand on the ear that was nearer. He scratched her back very comfortably. He felt that he would be able to do all that was necessary.

. . . He doubted whether a saw would be mutually satisfactory, but perhaps a chisel . . . ?

They entered his workshop side by side, and the subsequent events may best be indicated by "noises off stage". Actually, we do not know what happened. Probably the effects of the injection, which was certainly not as permanent in its nature as the first one, were beginning to clear as the carpenter turned the key on the inside of his workshop door, but beyond that . . . well, she was a very intelligent animal.

We are dealing with the events of 1990, which, it has become difficult to investigate in these minor details. If anyone should have penetrated that side-turning from the Berkhamsted High Street at the time with which we are dealing, and met a rotund and complacent sow—Well, it would be interesting to know.

The Council of Twenty-One met in a plainly-furnished room in the London University buildings. They had no need of the vulgarity of material ostentation. Individual members might indulge in castle or park or palace, and none would stay them, for the earth was theirs, and common men lived or died at their pleasure, but collectively their power needed no pomp to display it. It lay in formulæ which only they—or perhaps only some of them—could read: in power-house and test-tube: most of all, in the fear of the unknown

that lay, like a shadow of death, over the ignorant populace that they ruled and exploited.

Once before, in the twilight of the Middle Ages, this shadow had lengthened across the world, but the people of that time had struck viciously with fire and cord, and had stamped back into smouldering ash the threat that might otherwise have won, even then, its dark dominion over them.

Now it had triumphed, and not only the members of the Council, but their meanest student could walk securely among a host of common men, though he knew there was not one but would have slain him gladly. They were the terror that walked at noon, and there was none so bold as to lift even a glance of hatred against them.

President Brisket sat at the table's head, with the Secretary of the Council, Dr. Acton-Shaw, at his right hand.

Dr. Acton-Shaw was himself one of the Council, as it was not considered expedient that its minutes should be in the hands of an official of inferior status or responsibility, nor were these minutes, dealing largely, as they did, with the application of the abstruser sciences, always easy to take.

The Secretary was a small man, with a very wizened face, and a habit of peering, as though he suffered from partial blindness. In fact, his sight was excellent, his observation abnormal, and his memory for fact or face an amazement, even to the trained minds that were round him. With these qualities he made no enemies, for he expressed no opinions. No one knew what he thought. So far, there had been no evidence that he thought at all.

There are many battles that are decided before the moment of actual conflict, by the courage or cowardice of those who approach to the encounter. Men defeat themselves more often than they are defeated by the assault of circumstance. But, on this occasion, a psychologist, investigating the mental confidence of either side, or observing the careful preparations

on which such confidence rested, might have foretold their victory with an equal certainty.

The agenda which the Secretary had prepared from the President's instructions, and from the requisitions of members, included the name of Dr. Sturmie for the first time in the history of the Council.

Dr. P. A. Sturmie to address the Council on FUNDAMENTALS, and to move a resolution.

Immediately after, there came the name of Professor Borthin *to address the Council on the progress of BRAIN-GRAFTING, and to move a resolution.*

The atmosphere, as the scientists entered, one by one, and took their accustomed seats, was oppressive with the sense of a coming storm. The majority were not men of aggressive temperament. They only wanted to be left alone to the pursuit of their own researches. Now that the earth was theirs, and they could demand what they would for apparatus or experiment, they had no wish but to be left in quietness to cultivate the opportunity which life had offered.

But they knew, all of them more or less, of the conflict which was impending. And there were only seven members who had not some private knowledge in reserve of swift and secret ways by which he might destroy his colleagues should he be disposed to do so.

President Brisket came late. He entered with an almost jaunty confidence. He glanced down the agenda which lay before him, with light words of bantering comment.

"Dr. Sturmie! . . . Always glad to hear Sturmie. . . . Quite a lightweight subject for you, doctor. Almost skittish. . . . Borthin? . . . Oh, yes. I remember. 'The babies' brains. . . . Always enterprising."

Then his manner changed. He drew a small tube from his pocket and laid it on the table before him.

He spoke now with a grave elation. "Gentlemen, when these

routine matters are over, I've something of real importance to tell you. An avenue is opening before us of unimagined life and power. I am going to show you an experiment on myself, and I am going to offer its benefits to you also, when I have demonstrated what they are. . . . But we'll get through the agenda first, and we'll try to make it as short as possible. . . . Dr. Sturmie will address us on—what is it? Oh, yes. FUNDAMENTALS."

Dr. Sturmie did not rise. His age and infirmities excused him from such an ordeal. He had shown no sign of hearing what had been said, but now he began to speak. At first, his tone was low, an indistinct rumbling from the depths of his massive chest. He looked at no one. He seemed to be unaware of the audience by which he was surrounded.

But as he went on, his voice became louder, his articulation clearer. Much that he said was difficult to understand, even for the select audience he addressed. Members leant forward eagerly to catch the pregnant sentences as they fell. Now and then he became strangely lucid, so that, though he spoke of things which are beyond the ordinary imaginations of men, a child could have understood him. The listeners felt that he spoke of things that they had always known but that they had never been able to formulate, to articulate, previously. Had he concluded by moving that President Brisket should be sent to an Infants' School, it is doubtful whether there would have been less than nineteen votes to support him; but his motion was simply this: *That any member, after this date, who shall speak on subjects of which he is ignorant, shall be dismissed from the Council.*

Hearing the resolution, the President decided instantly to ignore the fact that it was so clearly aimed at himself, and to put it without discussion. He did not merely ignore the attack, he swept it contemptuously back. Since he had taken that injection three days ago, his brain felt equal to anything.

"Well, gentlemen," he said briefly, "we've all enjoyed the address, but we've got some important business coming, so I'll put the resolution at once. It seems a good one to me, though we should all be sorry if Sturmie should have to leave us in consequence. Oh, you never know."—As the astonished Sturmie, really roused for once, turned a heavy contemptuous glance in his direction.—"I've got something to say about Space and Time myself before we part this afternoon. But that will come later. The resolution is . . . carried unanimously, of course. And now we'll hear about Borthin's brains. . . . Professor Borthin will address the meeting."

Professor Borthin rose quietly. Whatever he may have thought of the way in which the meeting was going, he gave no sign of perturbation. He began his address by explaining the progress which had been made in his laboratories in the processes of brain-grafting under prolonged anæsthetised conditions, with local stimulations to the growth of connecting tissue, so that after a period of unconsciousness, lasting from ten to fourteen days, the subject of the experiment would awake with an alien brain (or an alien body, if you should prefer so to express it), functioning smoothly and well. At this stage, he produced in a cage with climbing-bars, a guinea-pig, which he explained had been supplied with a brain from one of the smaller monkeys, and which now disported itself among the bars with a clumsy agility, giving somewhat the impression of a performing bear.

He had completed his preparations, he went on to explain, some weeks ago, for the transposition of the brains of children and dogs on a scale which could not fail to produce results of unusual interest. He had little doubt that the children would be able to contrive some measure of articulate speech from the throats of their new dwellings: he was hopeful that the dogs could be trained to use the power of speech which their new bodies would render available to them.

He wanted a large number of babies—healthy examples, the children of various sections of the community, professional, commercial, military, naval, artisan—even specimens of the superstitious religious sects which still lurked and lingered obscurely—so that their various reactions could be comprehensively studied. For this purpose he required power to make requisition among the babies which should be born during the next twelve months, including, if necessary, the power to order that such babies should be produced by suitable couples—the Council did not need his reminder that some sections of the community had almost ceased to produce children, unless ordered to do so under sufficient penalties, and he did not blind himself to the fact that the authority he was seeking might tend to make them additionally obstinate in such abstentions—so that, in twelve months' time, he could, he had no reason to doubt, make such report to the Council, and exhibit such infant and canine specimens, as would abundantly justify the experiment on which he was occupied.

He knew—he was sorry to know—that their esteemed President had not received his first request with the cordiality which he might have reasonably expected, but the claims of Science were paramount—surely, in that assembly, there was no need to urge it—and he appealed with confidence to the Council for the support he needed.

He moved his resolution accordingly.

He had scarcely resumed his seat when the President rose.

"I propose," he said, "to move the postponement of this resolution—not because I doubt the value of our friend's experiments, not because I doubt that the claims of Science are paramount, not because I doubt that many human brains may find congenial shelter in the skulls of dogs, but because I have also something to tell you of the development of the human brain, and because I believe, if you accept the offer

which I am able to make, we shall all be better fitted when next we meet to decide this question wisely."

Briefly and clearly, he proceeded to tell them of the nature of this discovery, of the injection which he had already taken, and of the further one which he would administer to himself in their presence. Amid a watchful silence, he drove the needle again into his own arm.

"In half an hour," he went on, "you may expect its effects to be apparent. In the meantime, I shall explain to you, in greater detail, the nature and qualities of the preparation, and the experiments that I have made already. After that, I shall propose to reply to Dr. Sturmie's somewhat violent attack upon myself. Should I succeed in convincing you that he is in error, you will recognise the value of the brain-stimulus which I have discovered.

"Gentlemen," he went on, his voice falling to a note of earnestness, and of apparent sincerity, "we are inclined to distrust one another. I know that there is more than one here who fancies himself secure in the belief that he could destroy me with impunity in three seconds from where he sits, should he decide to do so (he is mistaken, but never mind that), but I ask you this—if I offer to share this new power equally with you all, if I propose that it be confined to members of the Council, so that you will be supreme among all men, do I not show my loyalty and my good-will, and do I not provide a basis on which a new standard of reciprocal loyalty may be established among us?"

Here he paused, and looked round for the applause which was not slow to respond. For the moment, he had gained the ear of the Council. He had only to justify his boast to establish his supremacy. Only Sturmie sat silent and contemptuous, digesting the insult which he had received. Professor Borthin, with an expressionless face, joined in the applause. He was not deceived. He knew that one of them must be doomed.

But he would wait his time. The experiment had not yet succeeded.

Silent and watchful, he heard the President go on to the detailed explanations which he had promised, while the clock on the wall behind him ticked out the half-hour for which they waited.

Twenty minutes passed, and he became aware, with a quickened interest, that President Brisket was changing. But it was not to any apparent advance in intellectual alertness, not in the clarity or profundity of the remarks he was making, but there was a change, both in voice and manner. Even his face seemed different. He was smiling fatuously. What was he saying now?

Dr. Acton-Shaw, who was listening with his usual intentness, his wizened face slightly lifted sideways to the speaker, pushed his chair a little back from the table.

"You know," President Brisket was saying, "we don't love humanity as we ought. We don't even love each other. There's Borthin here, one of the best, who doesn't trust me as he should. He's got something up his sleeve now that he thinks could kill me.—And, gentlemen—I know I shall feel better when I've confessed it—I've got a little arrangement of my own that would hit back automatically if he tried it, and would kill you all, if I wished. . . . No, don't move. You're quite safe. I'm sure Borthin wouldn't hurt a fly. . . . But, if he did try, even I couldn't save you. You'd go so quickly you wouldn't know how you died. . . . Now we've got to alter all that. We've got to love each other, and the poor dogs, and Dr. Sturmie, and the dear little guinea-pigs. We mustn't think of ourselves. Sturmie thinks that I ought to resign, and, of course, I will. I know he didn't mean to be rude. He just hadn't thought of the Invasion of Energy, and what a difference it might make. It's almost sure to. . . . But Professor Borthin looks as though he's got something to say, and, of course, he

shall. . . . Professor Borthin will address the meeting."

Professor Borthin rose. "Gentlemen," he said briefly, "you have heard our esteemed President tender his resignation. Before we deal with the previous resolution, I move that the resignation be now accepted."

The President rose to reply. There was the same deprecating fatuous smile on his face, and he did not appear to resent the resolution which had been put forward so abruptly.

"Gentlemen, of course I'll resign. But we'd better have the resolutions one at a time, hadn't we? I'm sure Borthin doesn't really want the babies. . . . You didn't think of their mothers, did you, Borthin? . . . And we don't want to hurt the little doggies either. The resolution is . . . Those against?"

He looked round the wondering faces of the Council, but not a hand was lifted.

"I know I needn't put the affirmative. I'm sure no one will vote for a resolution like that," he went on, with a plaintive confidence.

Dr. Sturmie turned his huge head slowly from right to left, reading the faces of those around him. His voice rumbled out contemptuously.

"After this exhibition of senile decay—unless anyone else wants a dose of the same kind—I think we'd better have the resolution properly. It has been moved *That Professor Borthin have power to examine all babies which may be born during the next twelve months within thirty-five miles of London, and to retain as many as he may select for experimental purposes, and further that he may require that those whom he may nominate shall provide him with babies of their own breeding within twelve months of such order, under such penalties as he may consider suitable, should they fail to do so.* Those in favour? Carried nem. con. The President and Secretary not voting."

President Brisket got to his feet unsteadily. His eyes had a

curiously pathetic look, as of one who has lost his way in the dark.

Dr. Acton-Shaw looked at him again, and pushed his chair a little farther back from the table.

"Oh, no, gentlemen," he began plaintively, "you don't really mean that. You couldn't mean it, you know. Oh, no, Sturmie dear. I'm not an old fool, really. But I'm not sure we oughtn't to end at once, really I'm not. I think we must have gone the wrong way. . . ."

He sat down uncertainly, and as he did so, Dr. Acton-Shaw pushed his chair farther back, till it was clear of the central patterning of the floor on which the table stood.

A professor of chemistry, a dark slim man, younger than most, sitting half-way down the table, who had not spoken previously, interposed.

"Mr. President, I don't think you're quite yourself this afternoon. Won't you . . ." He may have been about to ask him to adjourn the meeting, but the sentence was never finished.

The President had been scraping with his foot under the table. Once to the left—once forward—twice to the right. He might be feeling a bit queer, but he hadn't forgotten that. It would be best for the race, and oh, so much for themselves!

Dr. Sturmie looked at him intently, and half leapt from his chair, with an agility which he had not shown for the past ten years, but he was too late. The great body collapsed so heavily that the chair cracked audibly in the sudden silence of the room.

Dr. Acton-Shaw, still pushing his chair backward as he rose, the minute-book carefully retained beneath his arm, observed his twenty colleagues sagging around the table in attitudes which looked uncomfortable, but which they appeared to endure very patiently.

He was not greatly surprised, and not at all disconcerted.

They were clever men, but he had been led to wonder for

some months past, as he had recorded their decisions, whether there might not be higher powers than they.

"There'll be bonfires to-morrow," he said thoughtfully. "I suppose I'd better clear." And then, with a new decision: "No, I won't do that. I expect I can do something to help. I'll ring up Wyndham."

He went out quietly to ring up the Premier who had been deposed by Professor Brisket a ghastly year ago.

Appeal

It was the first day of the trial of William Pennfield for the wilful murder of his wife Eliza, and a weak ray of October sunshine fell upon the massive suavity of the face of Bulford Bulfit, K.C., as he concluded his opening speech with one of those lucid summaries for which he was justly reputed among his professional brethren.

Bulford Bulfit was not of the order of prosecuting counsel who will pursue a prisoner with savage and relentless energy, who will brow-beat his witnesses, and passionately denounce his crime.

He had made his reputation in the civil courts, where he had specialised in that branch of litigation which had been one of the most flourishing by-products of the motor industry.

Even then, he had never been known to state a case unfairly. Rather, he would put the arguments on both sides with such exhaustive impartiality that the opposing counsel would feel that there was little left to say—and that little could only show him to the jury as a prejudiced advocate. Was it the fault of Bulford Bulfit if the facts were such that the balance must decline, however gently, in his client's favour, when he weighed them so carefully, and in such an equal scale? Was it wonderful if the jury were disposed to be guided by his cooler judgment, rather than by the obvious bias of an opposing advocate, or by the cautious hesitation and Janus-counsels of the learned judge?

After nine years of these interesting efforts, I will not say to pervert—for we know that English justice is never perverted—but to divert its course in the interests of those who hired him (which is the only reasonable object of paying huge fees for

ingenious advocacy), he found himself briefed for the Crown in a criminal case of the first importance—one of those cases which excite the interest of literally a hundred million readers of the daily press of two hemispheres, and, however simple in themselves, will leave the names of the legal gentlemen who are engaged upon them in the dazzling splendour of a world-wide fame.

It was the general feeling that a man who was obviously guilty, and admittedly contemptible, was fortunate to have the case against him put into the hands of so fair-minded and considerate an advocate. The jury would be able to deliver the expected verdict with the comfortable knowledge that there had not been any straining of evidence, nor even any severity of epithet, against the wretched culprit whom it was their unpleasant duty to deliver to the hangman's hand.

Now we may hear the main facts very clearly marshalled if we listen to him as he concludes a three-hours' speech with an impressive deliberation, summarising the evidence which he proposes to call—"Such," he is saying—"such is the case which it is my duty to lay before you.

"There is the fact—the admitted fact—that the prisoner was on bad terms with his wife. It will probably appear that he had reasons—perhaps serious reasons—for complaint against her. Reasons which may have excited sympathy in his favour among their mutual friends—which might have excited your own. Reasons which might condone, if they could not excuse, the crime of murder, in a perverted mind, when the pressure of other urgencies, all pointing in the same terrible direction, was added.

"There is the fact—the admitted fact—that the prisoner was living on terms of intimacy with Gladys Portman, and you will hear her tell you that she knew him as William Straker, and was not aware that he was a married man. She will tell you that she is about to become a mother, and that she was

urging him to marry her—that she had discovered the place of his employment, and had threatened to make trouble for him there, unless he fulfilled his promise before the end of the fatal month which was to see the death—the sudden, unexpected death—of the wife whose existence menaced his security, and destroyed his peace.

“You will hear from Gladys Portman that the prisoner had at last yielded to her importunity with an apparent willingness, and that the banns of their projected marriage were actually being called in his adopted name at her parish church while his wife was in robust health, four days before she died.

“You will have the evidence of Dr. Gusford, and of Professor Benley, who are agreed upon the cause of her decease, and who will tell you that it resulted from a drug which must have been taken in liquid within six hours of death—a drug which is not generally known, nor commonly sold, nor medically prescribed—and you will hear that this drug is used in the preparation of certain photographic material manufactured by the firm by which the prisoner was employed, and that he had access to it, and had been warned (as was the custom of the firm) of its particularly dangerous nature.

“You will hear also that the prisoner was in serious financial difficulty, which you may regard as a natural consequence of his domestic duplicities, and that these difficulties would be relieved by the death of his wife, who had a small separate income from a fund which he had settled upon her, which sum would revert to him on her decease, and whose life he had recently insured for £600.

“It is also a fact—and I should be failing in my duty should I omit to emphasise it—but there is no direct evidence that the poison was administered by the prisoner.—None.—That is to say, if the prisoner put the fatal dose into the glass of milk which his wife was accustomed to take on retiring, he did not call a witness to observe the action.

"So far as our information goes, he and his wife were the sole occupants of the house on the night of the tragedy—I believe that he will give his own account of these circumstances—so that he could have acted without fear of oversight and with some hope that he could commit the crime with impunity.

"It is not reasonable to suppose that anyone contemplating such a crime would commit it while under the observation of others. Circumstantial evidence is all that we can obtain, and all that we can expect to obtain.

"If it be established that this woman has died of poison, we may commence by asking who, among those who had access to her, had any motive for desiring her death; we may ask who had the means of procuring the poison from which she died; we may ask who had the opportunity of administering it. To each of these three questions there is one answer, and only one, and it is always the same.

"If we are to accept circumstantial evidence at all—that is to say, if we are to accept the only possible evidence—it may be difficult to imagine a stronger case than that which I am about to bring before you. Motive—means—opportunity—as we look for these we find them all and only in the person of the prisoner who is now before you. Short of the production of an actual witness, we may ask ourselves what further evidence of such a deed it can be reasonable to expect, or possible to obtain."

At this point the learned counsel paused, and there was a moment of impressive silence before he continued. Then he spoke with an accent of hesitation and reluctance, as though he were forced to make a further point which he would willingly have left in silence.

"It is not for me to forestall the defence, or to suggest what may appear to be the only possible alternative to the guilt of murder—the possibility that the poison may have been self-

administered. A poor defence may be better than none at all, and it may be that my learned friend will ask you to put aside the evidence—the overwhelming evidence—which I shall place before you, and to substitute a theory of suicide for which there is no shadow of evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, and which would have been so utterly causeless, and so amazingly opportune—but, in view of this possibility, I am bound to call your attention to the fact that the prisoner has refused to admit the only evidence that could be produced on this point—the first-hand evidence of the dead.”

His voice sank almost to a whisper on the final words, and the silent audience stirred uneasily at this allusion to an innovation which was still regarded with superstitious dread by the more illiterate members of the community, and was opposed by the narrower of the religious bodies that still lingered stubbornly to bear witness in an enlightened age to the earlier follies of mankind.

“As you know,” Mr. Bulford Bulfit resumed in a more conversational tone than he had adopted previously, “the law does not allow the introduction of mediumistic or *clairvoyant* evidence in criminal trials, except on the request, or with the consent, of the accused; and, as you know, there are those who decline, on religious grounds, to avail themselves of such evidence, even when it would be of the greatest help for their vindication.

“We may respect such prejudices, though we may not share them, and did it appear—were it even remotely possible to suppose—that the prisoner were retarded by such scruples, I should be the last to urge it to the prejudice of the case against him.

“But can this be the case? There is evidence to be called which will show him to have been an ardent supporter of the Spiritist movement, and both he and his wife to have been active members of the Spiritist Church. We are entitled to ask—we are, indeed, bound to ask—with what motive it is

that the prisoner has refused to accept the suggestion of the prosecution that he should agree upon the selection of a suitable medium, through whose lips we might hear his wife's own account of the incidents of the fatal night."

He paused again, and may have been about to resume his seat, or to advance some further argument, when the prisoner's counsel, Mr. Percival Ballinger, who had been engaged in an animated though whispered consultation with his client, rose hastily, and Mr. Bulford Bulfit, waving his hand in a gesture of courteous deference, as though he rather preferred to be interrupted than not, or wished to act with easy generosity to the advocate of a hopeless cause, resumed his seat.

"I am reluctant to interrupt the peroration," Mr. Ballinger remarked so pleasantly that the acid undertone of sarcasm was only observable by those who were already acquainted with the protagonists, "but it would have been unfair to my learned friend, and lacking in respect to the court, to allow him to mislead himself farther.

"I might have suggested a more reasonable, as well as a more generous, interpretation of the prisoner's decision—the natural reluctance of one who is conscious of having wronged his wife in life, and who may have been indirectly, though not legally, responsible for her self-inflicted death, to appeal to her, under such circumstances. I might have suggested that it is a scruple which does him honour, and which will secure for him the sympathy of every generous mind—but the occasion does not arise. I am happy to say that I have prevailed upon my client to put his own feelings aside, and, in the interests of justice, to consent to the admission of the mediumistic evidence which has been requested by the prosecution."

He resumed his seat, and Mr. Bulford Bulfit half rose to inquire suavely at what stage his learned friend desired that such evidence should be interposed.

Mr. Ballinger replied that the defence would adopt this

evidence as their own, and that it would therefore be called after the prosecution had completed their case.

Mr. Bulford Bulfit only nodded in answer. It was a right of choice which was reserved to the defence in relation to this class of evidence, to which the usual methods of cross-examination could not be applied with precision, and Mr. Ballinger was entitled to the tactical advantage which he had taken. Mr. Bulfit commenced to open his case without further preface. He called Gladys Portman.

She proved to be a pleasant-faced young woman, quietly dressed, whose low-voiced and sometimes tearful answers, and occasional half-frightened glances at the prisoner, won the ready sympathy of all who heard her.

At the conclusion of her evidence, the judge suggested that it would be a convenient point at which to adjourn, and, as a judge's opinion on such a point is rarely challenged, Mr. Percival Ballinger reserved his cross-examination until the following day. . . .

"I suppose you were bound to try it," Mr. Bulfit remarked to his learned friend as they were in the disrobing-room three minutes later, "but your client didn't look very pleased. . . . I couldn't help wondering."

"The man's as innocent as I am," Mr. Ballinger replied easily, "and when you've finished your case it'll just show how worthless that class of evidence is. It isn't really necessary for us to call any evidence at all. There's only guess-work to answer. But I won't take risks in a case of this kind."

He spoke confidently, but he was troubled in mind as to the wisdom of the course on which he had insisted. William Pennfield had been equally firm on two points—he had not poisoned his wife, or ever thought of so doing, so that the act must have been her own; but he would not agree that her evidence should be called.

He had only given way when his counsel had threatened to

throw up the case if he were not allowed to conduct it in his own way, but—no, he hadn't looked very pleased.

Anyway, Mr. Ballinger reflected, he was doing his best, and it wasn't his funeral. He went on to his club.

The second day went badly for William Pennfield.

The cross-examination of Gladys Portman was brief, and did little to remove the impression which had been created by her evidence on the previous afternoon.

It was clear that she had been meanly and cruelly deceived by the prisoner, who had taken advantage of a genuine affection, and that she was in no way responsible for the supervening tragedy. Probably Mr. Ballinger showed a wise discretion in getting her out of the box so speedily.

After that, the hours passed in dreary iteration of the evidence which had been outlined in the opening speech of the prosecuting counsel. The *post-mortem* evidence of the doctors: the evidence of the prisoner's financial difficulties: the evidence of the pre-nuptial settlement: the evidence of the insurance: the evidence of the calling of the banns of marriage with Gladys Portman: the evidence that he had access to the poison which had been found in the body of the dead woman.

There was all the usual evidence which is introduced to create a delusion of proof in cases where no proof exists, which would have excited a keener interest had not the knowledge of the sub-natural evidence which was to follow given to it all a note of futility; for what possibility of condemnation would there be if the voice of his wife should be heard in his vindication? Or what hope of escape, if it should denounce his guilt?

Yet the court stirred to a quickened interest when the case for the prosecution closed, and Mr. Percival Ballinger rose to address the jury. Aware that he was probably the only man in that crowded court whose mind was not fully made up as to the guilt of his client, aware also that his words would have

little weight to rebut it, unless they should be supported by the incalculable evidence of the dead, he was satisfied to open his defence with a few brief and simple sentences.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said easily, "you have heard a great deal of evidence about a great many things from a great many excellent people, and you may have noticed that I have made no effort to cross-examine them upon it. Probably most of it may be true enough, and I am not concerned with denial. Unlike the prosecution, I shall be content to call two witnesses only. But they have the advantage of being the only two who know anything about the matter. I shall call the prisoner—and the dead."

Then he called the name of William Pennfield, and the prisoner, looking very nervous and pallid, left the dock and entered the witness-box, with a warder beside him.

It is to be admitted that the accused man did not assist his case, either by the evidence itself, or by the manner in which it was given.

Under the direction of his own counsel he got on well enough, though alternating between painful pauses of hesitation and bursts of nervous volubility. He admitted his deception of Gladys Portman. He admitted almost everything that had been alleged against him. He admitted that his married life had been acutely miserable. He admitted that he had had access to the poison from which his wife had died.

He went farther than that; stating that he had taken home some of the fatal drug a few weeks earlier, as he had work to do for his firm (so he said), which he was completing in the evenings. He said that his wife knew where it was kept, and that he had specially warned her concerning its deadly nature. After her death, he found that it had disappeared.

He said that there had been a quarrel of exceptional violence that evening arising from the fact that his wife had discovered some letters of Gladys Portman's in one of his coat-pockets

during the day, and had charged him with his infidelity. In desperation, he had announced the resolution which he had already formed to leave her, and they had retired, at last, to separate rooms. In the morning she was dead, but he swore that he had done nothing to injure her.

Then Mr. Bulford Bulfit rose to cross-examine.

Quietly, almost genially, he took the wretched man through his relation with Gladys Portman, exposing all the mean evasions and lies on which it was founded, and which had been used to betray her. He dealt with them so that they appeared to be part of the prisoner's natural and normal conduct.

Then he asked quietly: "Do you remember a conversation in a railway compartment a few weeks ago, concerning a recent murder? It was a case in which a man had strangled a woman who had become an encumbrance to him. Was it remarked facetiously by someone in the compartment that a good many men would like to treat their wives in the same way, and did you reply: 'Some women's necks are too tough'?"

The witness did not answer. He clutched the rail of the witness-box in a nervous panic. He licked dry lips and glanced appealingly at the impassive face of his counsel.

Mr. Ballinger, wondering that his client lacked the nerve to speak the denial which would have disposed of a suggestion which was unsupported by any previous evidence, rose to object to the question.

There were a few minutes of animated exchange between the judge and the opposing counsel. In the end, the question was allowed, the judge adding: "Should the witness deny having used the words, I shall advise the jury that there is no evidence to support the allegation, and they must dismiss it from their minds entirely."

The question being repeated, the prisoner said weakly that

he couldn't remember, but, anyway, "he hadn't meant anything".

Quietly and conversationally, the cross-examination continued.

"Did you tell anyone at your office when you took home this deadly drug?"

"No."

"Had you any permission to do so?"

"No, but——"

"Never mind the 'but'. I only wanted the fact. You had no permission. Did you tell anyone at your home—anyone except your wife—that you had brought it?"

"No, but——"

"Never mind the 'but'. It's the fact I want. You told no one except your wife. Then you didn't mind if any others poisoned themselves. You only wanted to protect you wife. Was that it?"

The witness looked round the court, at the amused or contemptuous eyes that met him from every side, with the aspect of a hunted thing, but he made no answer.

"Very well," said Mr. Bulford Bulfit pleasantly, "we won't press it. It mayn't be very easy to answer. . . . It was very convenient for your plans that your wife should have committed suicide that night. . . . Were you very surprised?"

"No—yes—I mean . . ."

"Perhaps the first answer may be the best. You couldn't be very surprised when you had left the letters where she could find them, and shown her where you had put the poison, could you? . . . But that's your tale, you know. . . . You've told us how you could lie to deceive a woman. . . . Could you lie to save your own skin? Don't say yes or no without thinking."

The witness said neither. His face was an unhealthy purple, and he swayed against the rail that he was clutching convulsively.

Mr. Bulford Bulfit observed his condition. "I won't press for an answer," he said magnanimously.

"Do you wish to re-examine, Mr. Ballinger?" asked the judge.

Mr. Ballinger shook his head.

The warder touched the prisoner's arm and led him back to the dock.

The second day's proceedings were over.

The medium had been accommodated in a chair at the reporters' table. She lay back with closed eyes and a lifted face, her arms stretched straight out on the table before her. The court, waiting in breathless silence, noticed that they were twitching slightly.

Suddenly a voice came from the medium's mouth, a voice unlike her own, as they had heard it take the oath a few minutes earlier. It was loud and shrill, and asserted with a sharp impatience: "I am here. Eliza Pennfield. Who wants me?"

Mr. Ballinger answered, as was customary, without rising.

He leant slightly forward, saying in a conversational tone: "We have only one question to ask you. Will you tell us how you died?"

There was silence for a full minute—it seemed an hour to those who waited—silence which was only broken by the loud, slow ticking of the clock that hung on the wall at the farther end of the court.

Then the harsh sound of a woman's laughter broke mockingly from the medium's mouth.

"*Tell him to ask himself,*" came the high voice that followed as the laughter died.

Mr. Ballinger looked at the judge, who did not respond. He tried again.

"I am asking on your husband's behalf. He is accused of

having murdered you, and I implore you to answer, so that this terrible charge may be lifted from him. He has appealed to you because there is no one else who can give the evidence which is required to clear him. Will you tell the court how you died?"

But there was no answer. Mr. Ballinger assented to Mr. Bulfit putting the question, but the medium remained quiescent. The judge took up the appeal, but the result was the same.

It was only when it was feared that the trance might end before any reply had been obtained that the judge said: "It is a somewhat irregular course to take, but if neither of you raises objection, I propose to let the prisoner question her."

The learned counsel agreed that it was the only remaining way, and all eyes were turned to the prisoner, who stood, white-faced, with his trembling hands on the dock-rail, showing little joy at the prospect of his vindication which the occasion offered.

The clock ticked on, slowly and loudly in the silent court, and the judge said at last, with a look of half-tolerant pity at the abject prisoner: "If you will not speak, I'm afraid the jury may be inclined to draw a somewhat unfavourable inference."

Then the wretched man gathered himself, and said in a timid voice which yet penetrated to the further corner of the silent crowded hall:

"Eliza, tell them I didn't."

His eyes wandered plaintively among the jury. He seemed afraid to look toward the medium he was addressing.

There was no pause now. Eliza's harsh high voice sounded through the court, and re-echoed from the roof in an inhuman eerie way, that men did not notice then, so intently were they listening for the words, though they remembered afterwards.

"It's no use, Bill. I saw you do it." The words ended in another burst of laughter, shrill and high and mocking.

Those who were looking at the prisoner noticed that his face

changed as he heard her. Its timid aspect altered to a look of almost insensate fury. "*If I could only reach——*" his shrill voice quavered, and then ended. He sank on to the floor of the dock. The warders bent on either side to raise him, but it was a dead man that they lifted, and while they did so the mocking laughter changed to a sudden note of terror.

"*I didn't mean it, Bill. I didn't mean it.*" The medium's scream rose till it startled the passers in the outer street. "*Keep off—keep off.*" Her hands rose, clutching, to protect her throat. She slipped down from the chair, disappearing beneath the table, from which her voice still rose in an agony of protesting terror.

. . . The jury agreed that they would have brought in a verdict of "Not guilty", but English justice will pass no judgment upon the dead.

Proof

THE pursuit of knowledge is its own justification. At this distant day, looking dispassionately upon it, it is difficult to condemn, in its intention at least, the French revolution of 1984, which, unlike that of two centuries earlier which aimed at the elimination of a social caste, and in direct opposition to that of the Russian Bolshevists which aimed at the removal of the intelligentsia, was intended to eradicate the inefficient and the inadequate by the prompt and painless method of the guillotine.

The inception of the Act by which the French nation, ever supreme in logic and first in political experiment, affirmed its determination to eliminate its own stupidity, was due to the genius of M. Jules Bouchere, as it was due to his sustained and passionate eloquence as Premier that it was first carried and afterwards re-affirmed by two overwhelming votes in the Chamber of Deputies.

That it should have been necessary to re-affirm a decision the reasonableness of which was so obvious to intelligent people that to oppose it was to assert beyond argument their own unfitness to survive this sane and kindly inquisition, was due solely to the mis-directed energy and courage of M. Pierre Duclos, who was perhaps the only man alive in France at that day who could have done it without condemning himself in the first moment of opposition. For how could his country remove for stupidity a man whose dramatic work was admitted throughout the civilised world to have eclipsed both Shakespeare and Molière, and to be equalled only by that of Ben Jonson and G. B. Shaw?

The first occasion of his opposition concerned the fate of a

simple and patriotic Frenchman named Leroux, who had himself applied for condemnation. The man had come to the prison gates of Rouen, saying: "I am too stupid to see the wisdom of what you are doing. When you eliminated my wife and two sons I lacked sufficient patriotism to be really pleased, though their stupidity was a fact of which I had often told them. Remove my head for the glory of France."

The incident would have passed unnoticed, and the body of Leroux would have been disconnected from a head which was unfit to direct it, had it not come to the knowledge of M. Duclos, who moved a resolution in the Chamber of Deputies that the man was not eligible for elimination, on the ground that he had shown unusual intelligence in applying for his own destruction.

The debate which followed was of exceptional interest, being conspicuous both for the sustained eloquence and the logical subtleties of the two great political protagonists. "How," asked M. Duclos, "if you advocate this appalling massacre, can you condemn for stupidity one who has sufficient wisdom to support your policy, and to approve it even to his own condemnation, which few could be found to do?"

"How," retorted M. Bouchere, "can you argue that when he offered himself to death he affirmed his wisdom, unless you are yourself prepared to approve the measure which would condemn him? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Yet, after three days of such exchanges, M. Bouchere saw that there was sufficient feeling in favour of Leroux among his supporters to render it prudent for him to compromise the direct issue, which he did by proposing that the man should be placed under observation for a period of six months, to which Duclos agreed very readily. "In six months," he was heard to mutter, "in six months you yourself——" His voice died in his beard.

But, having made this concession, M. Bouchere promptly

followed it by asking the Chamber for confirmation of a policy which was steadily removing the inferior elements of the population of France, and this was carried with acclamation, the single vote of M. Duclos being recorded against it.

The second resolution of confidence in the Government, and in support of the policy with which its name is identified, was moved in a rather different atmosphere.

Four months of steady deletion had removed most of the more obviously unintelligent members of the community, leaving, however, a large number of dull or doubtful intellects which yet had sufficient intelligence to apprehend the peril in which they stood, as the title of selective elimination rose toward them. The proportion of such individuals in the civilisation of that day, which had protected their youth, and been tolerant of the inefficiency of maturer years, was very considerable. There were many thousands of secretly-apprehensive people who would gladly have agreed that a sufficient reduction had been made already. But there were few who would adventure the perilous prominence that such a declaration would bring upon them, with its almost certain consequence; and there were still a large number who felt sufficiently secure in the reality of their attainments, or the fortress of their conceit, to look with complacency upon the surrounding slaughter.

There was another element which made it difficult to discontinue the executions. A vested interest is very quickly established. The judges and officials of the special courts which had been set up for the examination of the accused; the lawyers who were profitably occupied in the realisation and distribution of their estates; the painters and repairers of guillotines; all the householders in the execution-squares who benefited by the letting of windows, and the shop-keepers in the neighbouring streets; all the publishers of improving literature,

including those who had commenced the issue of incomprehensible periodicals which were very widely bought, because it was considered a form of life-insurance to be seen to read them; all these, and a thousand others, were too directly interested in the campaign of extermination to welcome any word that could be spoken against it.

M. Bouchere saw that the time had come when he must ask once more for the confidence of the Chamber, while he could yet do it in the expectation that none but M. Duclos would have the temerity to vote against him.

Ascending the tribune, he spoke for over two hours without the interruption of dissent, in passionate defence and exaltation of the policy which was raising France to an intellectual level without precedent in the history of humanity—a level which must make its people pre-eminent among the races of mankind. The only thing which could cloud the issue, or diminish the triumph of the land they loved, would be that other nations should attempt to imitate a practice which they had lacked the courage or the imagination to be the first to institute. With a full knowledge of his responsibility, with a sense of the gravity of the words he uttered, he warned the world that the very suggestion of such a policy would be regarded as an unfriendly act, bringing war upon themselves—instant war, while yet the more stupid elements of their populations remained alive, to hamper their operations and confound their counsels. The intellectual eminence of France, which she had bought with the blood of millions, was a crown of glory which should be hers till the stars fell. . . . At this point, his words were lost in the deafening applause of a Chamber which had leapt to its feet in a delirium of patriotic fervour. Only M. Duclos remained seated, silent and sardonic, meeting his opponent's eyes even at that moment with a smile of contemptuous derision.

M. Bouchere looked and saw. Was it not at this climax of

triumph that he should strike, if ever, and annihilate his enemy? As the storm of applause died, he commenced again, addressing himself, as all might observe, directly to his solitary adversary, who continued to regard him silently with that expression of unchanged contempt, until he made some passing allusion to the speedy and painless exit which was allowed, by the mercy of France, to the citizens whose stupidity would otherwise have obscured her fame. Then there came from his lips one incredible word, clear and unmistakable. Looking full at the Premier, he ejaculated the unforgivable word *Fool*.

When the President's bell had done something to subdue the resultant hubbub, he addressed the delinquent with his usual dignity. He was sure that M. Duclos would wish to express his regret, and to withdraw an expression which it would not be customary to hear in such an Assembly.

M. Duclos replied that he hoped that he would never fail in respect to the Chamber, or in obedience to the President's ruling. But his difficulty was that he had not used the word as a vulgar expletive, or in any offensive or abusive way. It was a considered opinion which he had long held, and which was convincingly illustrated by the remark which he had interrupted. He was of opinion that *M. Bouchere was a stupid man*.

The Chamber sat for one silent moment, as though stunned by the audacity of that attack not merely upon the political position, but upon the life of its leader. The next was pandemonium. But the President had seized that moment of silence with his customary coolness and promptitude, and had adjourned the Assembly.

At the next meeting of the Chamber, after the Premier's vote of confidence had been carried with the usual single dissident, M. Bouchere rose confidently to submit a further motion to the Assembly that M. Duclos should be directed to

withdraw the offensive expression which he had used against him, with a suitable apology for its use, and should then be required to absent himself from the House while his position would be considered by his fellow-members.

"But," M. Duclos interjected cheerfully, "I do not propose to withdraw. I propose to justify it."

The President intervened. Did M. Duclos appreciate the gravity of the position which he was taking up?

M. Duclos said that he did. He asserted with confidence that M. Bouchere was a stupid man. If he could not prove it, they could call him by the same name.

M. Bouchere, always quick and accurate in gauging the temper of the Assembly, saw that it would be useless to attempt to avoid the issue, which promised members a much superior entertainment to anything which could be gained from the rebuke or expulsion of one of their number for an unseemly word. He replied confidently that he repudiated the charge, and challenged his accuser to justify it.

M. Duclos asked if it would not demonstrate his stupidity if it could be shown that he had instituted a revolution so terrible and so bloody without having sufficient intelligence to understand its consequences?

M. Bouchere, without committing himself to this general proposition, denied that he had failed to do so. Let M. Duclos be specific in accusation, and he would know how to reply.

M. Duclos was quite willing to be specific. Had not M. Bouchere committed himself to the random and proofless statement that the form of execution to which he was subjecting all the obtuser members of the community resulted in a particularly speedy and painless death? Might not such an assertion, made without proof, and in defiance of probability, be accurately described as the words of a stupid man?

The Premier answered in genuine surprise at the weakness of the accusation which had been made against him. There

was no doubt that decapitation involved an instantaneous and probably quite painless dissolution. It was too obvious for detailed argument among intelligent men.

But his opponent held to his point. How did M. Bouchere know, or why should he suppose, that consciousness was discontinued in the severed head, which remained uninjured, with its organs of sight and hearing unimpaired, though the means of producing sound or motion might be no longer available?

M. Bouchere replied, with more patience than could have been expected, that the fact that the head was severed from the supply of blood on which it depended would alone be sufficient to produce an instantaneous oblivion. Was it not common knowledge that the mere slackening of the heart's supply to the brain would produce unconsciousness, as in the common experience of a faint or swoon? How much more——?

"There are few things more painful," M. Duclos replied, "than to hear a man of reputed intelligence asserting that of which he has no knowledge, and discussing that of which he is ignorant, with an assumption of his own finality." Would Mr. Bouchere reconcile this convenient theory with the vociferations of the domestic hog, when subjected to the familiar surgical operation which introduced it to its violent—he would not say to its untimely—end? Vociferations which were continued (though in a scale which descended with some rapidity) for a sufficient time to demonstrate to any intelligent and impartial mind that the diversion of the stream of life from its accustomed channel did not produce the unconsciousness which had been assumed by the facile stupidity—yes, he would not shirk the word, the only adequate word—of the man who had misguided France. He, at least, did not make random assertion. He did not mislead the Assembly with the temerity of a proofless word. The demonstration was at the door.

As he spoke these words, his voice was drowned by the shrill

discordant protests of a quadruped whose unwilling rotundity was dragged forward to the central floor of the chamber, beneath the eyes of members too astonished, or, it may be, too interested to protest against this unprecedented invasion.

We may consider the scene which followed with averted eyes. It is enough to say that the pig died at the hands of its attendant butcher, as so many of its ancestors had done before it, though in obscurer surroundings. Enough to record that it emphasised its objection in the usual manner, and, to the inward consternation of M. Bouchere, that it continued its protests, though with a descending liveliness, even when the stream of life had slackened from its deflated body. In a final demonstration, and with a cruelty which must be justified, if at all, by the gravity of the dependent issue, the deputies witnessed the butcher's weapon driven again into the neck of an animal that was squealing faintly, as in a dream, and observed the note to rise again in a reanimated though momentary protest against this final indignity.

The pig died, and the originator of this astonishing demonstration looked at his opponent with a smile of sardonic satisfaction. But M. Bouchere had now had time to consider his position. He ascended the tribune to denounce with real or simulated indignation the indecent folly which would expose that Assembly to the contempt or derision of a hilarious world. He touched a note that stirred an approving murmur when he asked with passionate scorn if M. Duclos considered it a seemly thing to make comparison between his countrymen—and his country-women—even the more stupid among them, and the domestic hog? But he was obviously disconcerted, though for a moment only, by the sharp interjection of his opponent: "Then you shouldn't serve them in the same way."

But he went on, when he felt that he had secured the ear of the Assembly, to ridicule the absurdity, as he condemned

the indecency, of the demonstration which had been thrust upon them. Was not every school-child familiar with the theory of reflex actions? Was there consciousness in the words of delirium? In the antics of which some people were guilty in the dentist's chair?

What might have resulted had it been left to M. Duclos to reply can be a matter of conjecture only, for M. Pardieu, a deputy who had been recently disappointed in a well-founded expectation of office, succeeded in gaining the President's eye as the Premier descended from the tribune, and was the next to address the Assembly. He said briefly that the question which M. Duclos had raised was too serious to be dismissed while its answer was a matter of conjecture only. The thought that the baskets of Frenchmen's heads that were removed at the end of the daily operations in the market-places of a hundred cities might include those who were still retaining a horrified consciousness of the fate which had fallen upon them—might even be suffering a physical agony of severed nerves which they were powerless to express or communicate—was not one which could be left unanswered, however stupid these persons might have been shown to be. . . . He suggested a simple experiment by which the question could be finally settled, and he proposed that judgment upon the conduct of M. Duclos and on the accusation which he had made against the Premier should alike be suspended in the meantime; and this solution was accepted unanimously.

Jacques Moulins was a man of an exceptional stupidity, who could not have escaped the inquisition for so many months had he not possessed a substantial fortune, which he used as freely as was possible to one of his avaricious and parsimonious nature to secure his safety. When he was selected, after exhaustive inquiry, as a particularly suitable subject for the proposed experiment, his fate was certain, for the evidences of his

stupidity were abundant, and there were few, if any, in his native village who were not able and willing to bear witness against him.

Convicted of a dense and somewhat mulish stupidity, he was informed, during the few hours which intervened between the inevitable sentence and its execution upon him, that his wealth would be handed over to a brother who had a reputation for shrewdness which would justify such an allocation (but with whom he was known to have had a bitter quarrel) unless he should succeed in winking with his right eye when asked to do so, a full minute after his head had been detached in the usual manner. Should he do this, however, his money would be distributed among his children in accordance with his dispositions and the French laws of inheritance.

The experiment was conducted in the sight of many thousands of people, and with a scrupulous fairness. M. Moulins was enjoined to fix his thoughts upon the wink which he would be required to perpetuate under such unusual disadvantages. When, with a characteristic stupidity, he began to struggle as he was being fastened to the board which would enable his neck to be presented to the guillotine at the appropriate angle, he was put on one side for a few moments to enable him to compose his mind, and, when the knife descended, his head was not allowed to fall into the usual receptacle, but the executioner had it grasped by the hair, so that he could place it at once upon a tureen or dish which had been provided in readiness, and which was of such a shape that it would remain upright upon it, almost as though it were rising from a natural collar.

The minute passed in a breathless silence. The executions were suspended. Even the seven stupid persons who were waiting their own decapitations may not have been entirely indifferent to the result of an experiment which was intended to demonstrate the nature of the experience which

they were also to undergo. A hundred binoculars were directed upon that passive, bloodless head. The cinematographic operators stood in readiness. The appointed official said in a slow, clear voice, of a suitable gravity: "*Jacques Moulines, if you desire that your property should be distributed according to your disposition and the laws of inheritance, I adjure you to wink with your right eye.*"

There were five seconds of tense expectancy, while every gaze was concentrated upon that ghastly visage, and then, slowly, steadily, completely, the left eye closed.

There was no doubt of that. Closed it remained. In that condition, with the right eye opened, and the left closed, it was subjected to the snapping of a hundred cameras. With a stupidity which persisted in death, Jacques Moulines had closed the wrong eye.

In doing this, he had given his hoarded wealth to be the lawyer's sport. He had started litigation which still persists, though his brother and children have gone to their destined ends, and of the money itself there is little—but that is another story.

The next day came, and the revolution of 1984 was an ended thing. Without change of law, without administrative order, it had ceased to function. The force which destroyed it was a common instinct of revulsion at which M. Duclos may have aimed when he led the attention of the nation to be concentrated upon the end of its victims, rather than upon the benefits which their deaths were supposed to bring. Before it ceased, it had been responsible for the deaths of 1,777,230 men, 1,183,026 women, and 11,314 children. Its influence upon the average intelligence of the people of France is a matter of history. But there was to be one more dramatic episode in the Chamber of Deputies before the curtain fell.

M. Bouchere might have been well content to forget the

challenge which had been thrust upon him, but his opponent held to his point with an unswerving determination. Speaking with a deliberate obtuseness, as though the administration of the law were being continued with its past severity, he claimed that the Premier should submit himself to its decision on the accusation of stupidity which he had brought against him—a motion which M. Pardieu was very quick to second.

So accused, and on the issue of the experiment which had been agreed between them, M. Bouchere was unable to avoid the trial. Nor, in the changed temper of France, in its moment of sharp reaction, could there be any doubt of the verdict. The jury were unanimous in their decision that M. Bouchere had shown himself to be a stupid man.

So there was to be one more demonstration of the efficiency of the guillotine in raising the intellectual standard of the race—an unavoidable demonstration, for how could M. Bouchere ask for himself a mercy which he had denied to almost three millions of his fellow-citizens? And it was at this point that M. Duclos intervened again—not to obstruct the doom which he may have felt it to be particularly fitting that the man should himself experience who had caused it to fall upon so many, but to offer the problematical advantage of a further experiment.

It appeared that a chemist of his acquaintance had invented a certain glutinous substance of which he asserted that, if it were smeared upon the knife of the guillotine immediately before it descended, it would prevent effusion of the blood both from the head and trunk of the separated individual, and protect them also from any septic atmospheric contagion. He suggested that, under such conditions, it should not be beyond the resources of the surgical science of the day (as much in advance of that of fifty years earlier as that had been in advance of the practice of the previous century) to reunite the severed body, and M. Bouchere might survive both to relate his experi-

ence and to acquire the wisdom which he now lacked.

As the drowning man will clutch at the useless straw, so did M. Bouchere at this unexpected glue-pot, though it was offered by the hand of him who had contrived his downfall.

* * * * *

The man could be seen for many years selling boot-laces at a street corner in the Rue de la Paix. There was a scar round his neck. He did a good trade with the foreign tourists. He was undoubtedly of weak or disordered intellect. It was supposed to have been the result of an unusual shock. He is said to have died in the epidemic of 2002.

. . . He always said that the experience had been like a pleasant dream, beyond which he had no memory to recall. It would be of interest, if he could be regarded as a reliable witness—but suppose that he said it only that he might annoy M. Duclos?

P.N. 40

“And Love was still the Lord of all”

IN the ninety-third year (second period) of the Eugenic Era, there lived a girl named P.N. 40, who was, on the fifteenth of April of that year, within a fortnight of the age and ordeal of marriage.

For (as we know), the Eugenist government of that time had decreed that every girl who was sufficiently sound in health and ancestry should marry between the first and tenth days of the May following her twenty-second birthday; the intention being that her first child should be born in the early spring, which Sir Mordith Blinkwell had shown to be the ideal period for such nativities.

The custom was subsequently modified when the statistics of twenty years showed that 67.03 per cent of first-born children had appeared in the inferior months of the year. Such is the perversity of women.

P.N. 40 was an exceptionally beautiful girl, which is an attractive subject for contemplation, but on the morning on which we first regard her she was an acutely miserable one, which is less so. The two statements may seem contradictory, but they are actually consequent.

She sat on the sunlit loggia of her ground-floor bedroom, in the early hours of that mid-April morning, gazing upon the 46.3 perches of ground which was the allotted portion for the back of every bungalow, with its two regulation trees and one bush, so planted as not to obstruct the light nor a duly assorted entrance of the four winds; and her mouth, which was made for quite a different purpose, was shut very savagely, and her eyes were sullen.

The Eugenist government, being laudably anxious to im-

prove the quality of the race, had realised that it cannot be done very rapidly under a strictly monogamous regime. It is a lamentable fact, illustrating how much Nature has yet to learn, that the two sexes are born in approximately equal numbers. In some cases, as with cattle or poultry, the position may be improved by slaughtering the less desirable of the calves or cockerels (the males getting the worst of it, as usual), but, after three bills to deal with human babies in this logical and eugenic manner had been defeated in successive years, it was recognised that the problem must be attacked by different methods.

The prohibition of the marriage of the unfit, which had been enacted at the commencement of the second era, was of no assistance to the solution of this difficulty, for they were found to be of about equal numbers in either sex. The mutilation of the superfluous was hardly likely to be proposed again, after the massacre of the seventh year, which had followed the introduction of a bill for this purpose, and which had rendered necessary the election of a new parliament, from which most of the familiar faces were unavoidably absent.

It was the epoch-founding brain of Professor Gested, working with its usual mathematical precision, which had resolved the problem. He perceived that the Potential Maximum Fecundity of women is not increased by a multiplication of husbands, whereas a plurality of wives may lead to a substantial increase in the P.M.F. of mankind.

Building upon the solidity of this premise, he evolved a plan by which such a plurality, up to a maximum of six, should be allotted to those members of his own sex who were beyond criticism either in individual or ancestral health.

He proposed that men who were over the age of forty-two should be exempt from these inflictions, but it was only the slanderous venom of his enemies which pointed out that he was then on the threshold of his forty-third year.

By a contrary provision, men of inferior physical grades were allotted less than one complete unit of feminine companionship, to a minimum of one-sixth, by which means he contrived:

(1) That a large majority of the next generation would be the children of a selected parentage.

(2) That all members of the community would be married (more or less), so that a minimum of opposition was aroused among the selfish anti-social voters who had done so much to retard the racial progress for which he toiled and pondered, for

(3) By this process of grading there would be no difficulty in avoiding all unallocated surplus, either of men or women, as the fraction of wife allowed to men of intermediate grades could be varied according to the number of women available.

Forty years had passed, and though the enforcement of this law had not been unopposed, nor always bloodless, yet it had been asserted successfully. The common-sense of the race, with its dread of the old barbarisms still refreshed by the teaching of the intermediate seminaries, had been sufficient to discipline the rebellious reactions of youth, or the selfish criminality of discontented women. But it had been found necessary to segregate the young of either sex with an almost absolute division. A great national ideal cannot be reached without individual sacrifice, which, as Professor Gested had pointed out in his initial essay upon the subject, should be endured with equanimity, if not with joy.

But P.N. 40, however superficially attractive, had a mind which was destitute of the higher patriotism. Her heart did not beat more rapidly when she considered the P.M.F. of her sex.

It beat faster at the foolish imagination that 48 V.C. had regarded her with unusual interest as he had assisted her last

February from the monoplane which had descended so unexpectedly (to him) on the shore of Llangorse, in Brecknockshire—48 V.C., whose ancestry included an epileptic great-aunt, and who wore the pink-and-yellow arm-stripes which graded him for one-fourth of a wife at the next allotment.

P.N. 40 did not curse, for she had never heard of bad language, nor could she have imagined its possibilities adequately. The interjection was deleted from the vocabulary of an enlightened state. Even the wail of infancy had been stilled by a corporal punishment which descended automatically as it was electrically stimulated by the sound. She did not curse, but her thoughts were murderous.

It was the night before, in the common-room, that she had been publicly rebuked for seditious indecency by the Instructress, because she had expressed the opinion that a girl could choose her husband much better than the Board of Allocation would be likely to do.

“A pure-minded woman,” she had been told severely, “does not discriminate between one man and another, if he be chosen as fit for fatherhood, nor does she rebel because she will only receive a fraction of his attentions.”

Well, if that were so, she was not pure-minded. Very far from it. . . .

The P.N. 40 branded beneath her chin was indelible. It would always proclaim her as the bearer of a health-proud name. Only the children of 47 L.K.-Z.V. 5 could claim a physical preference; and 47 L.K. was not only of a stainless ancestry for four generations on either side—in fact, since the first stud-book of the present series had been commenced—he was of a personal development so exceptional that when the Ministry of Pig-breeding, which was the most important government office under that which was held by the Premier (unless preference be given, in spite of its inevitable unpopularity, to that of the Ministry of Insight), had been awarded

to him, it had been generally regarded as an exceptionally seemly choice.

And 47 L.K. still lived a life of robust vigour, though his years were seventy. One of his six wives, although themselves the cream of the community, had shown an inferior vitality. She had died last year—died shamefully of a nameless cause, so that all her descendants had trembled lest the small red letter should be added to their branded names, which would consign them to a childless end.

If there were truth in the envious whisperings of the common-room, she herself, P.N. 40, was selected for the high honour of the vacant place.

On the first of May, at the festival of the Branding of Brides, she would receive her husband's number beneath her chin, behind the place on which her own appeared already.

At the day's end, in the solitude of her own room, she would be able to look in the mirror, and learn to whom she had been consigned. Modesty did not admit of an earlier curiosity.

Then there would be a period of ten days, during which she would be entitled, at any moment, to require an aeroplane to convey her to her husband's home. If the eleventh day came, and she had not departed—well, there would be no order to delay the fumigation of a section which should be no longer occupied.

. . . She knew that this allocation was not inevitable. Degeneration of character may disqualify the most physically-perfect for the honour of a Sixth-Grade marriage. She might do outrageous things during her last fortnight of freedom, such as would insure that she would never know the dignity of being the youngest wife of 47 L.K. She might even, by a diabolical ingenuity of graded follies, contrive to be classified with the Fourth-Grade women, who are the sole wives of a single husband.

But this thought brought no comfort. She did not merely

wish to be a monogamous wife. She wanted (with an almost obsolete vulgarity) to be the wife of a particular man whom she should never have seen—would, very certainly, never have seen, but for the maniac folly of P.T. 69, who had persuaded her to join in that disastrous escapade.

Besides, she was not free from the natural vanity of women. She could not easily endure the degradations which follow from a Fourth-Grade marriage. Girls of that class might be content enough, for they had expected nothing more, but she had been brought up differently. To pick her clothes on the fourth day, after the three upper grades had chosen all the lovelier colours! To sit in the back rows of the theatre, the solitary companion of the man beside you, and watch the grouped seats of the Sevens, Fives, and Threes, that graded backward, proclaiming the physical ignominy of the place to which you were relegated!

Such sacrifices have been made by women of ancient days (or so romance will have it) to secure the man of their choosing, but not, even by them, for a precarious difference in the percentage of a stranger's love.

The English schoolmasters in the public schools of the nineteenth century found that they could save themselves much trouble in the teaching of Greek and Latin (which were believed to be essential to the intellectual welfare of their pupils) if they stimulated their curiosity by providing them with the most indecent books which have survived in those languages, the vicious consequences of which procedure always filled them with a very innocent wonder.

It has to be chronicled, with whatever reluctance, that the seminaries of the Second Era were not free from a very similar obliquity. The study of the older forms of the English language was stimulated by the use of indecent text-books, one of the worst of which—entitled *The Oxford Book of English Verse*—P.N. 40 had nefariously retained at the conclusion of her

literary instructions. This book, though still used in schools, was not one which any decent woman would allow on the tables of her reception rooms. It is largely occupied with lauding the consequences of Self-selection, or with the advocacy of unions in conditions of precarious poverty; and it will even treat its most tragic imaginations—such as the mating of immature women—with an obtuse levity, subversive of every purer instinct in the mind that reads it. The great subjects of poetry, such as *The Intervals between Meals*, and *The Proper Spacing of Children*, are not even mentioned in these crude songs of a forgotten barbarism.

Cultivating her sorrow, as Folly will, P.N. 40 went inside, seeking the hidden book, with which she returned, and sat down to the idle turning of its familiar pages.

She knew that she could not be overlooked, except from the air, which, at this hour, was empty of random traffic on the lower airways. It was true that she might be under observation of the Ministry of Insight, but that (she supposed) was arithmetically improbable, and, anyway, it was a risk which was never absent.

There was the case last year of the third wife of 60 S.V.K., who had made complaint that she was ignored by her husband, and baited by his other wives in various illegal ways. Naturally, he had denied it. Naturally, also, if the other wives were of the disposition alleged against them, they had supported his denials. But her own evidence was given with such an air of sincerity, with such an accumulation of circumstance, that it had been almost impossible to disbelieve it. It seemed incredible that it should have been invented without some impulse of suffered wrong, so that the denials with which it was met were discredited by their own emphasis. Anyway, the Assessors had decided in her favour, and it was only when 60 S.V.K. had been condemned, and was awaiting sentence, that the M.I. had ordered a further investigation, at which it

had confronted the woman with a photographic record of herself and her husband in an attitude of affectionate intimacy. Threatened with the production of every moment of her life for the period in question, she had collapsed, and confessed the jealous origin of her baseless tales. . . .

No one had guessed, till then, the extent of the oversight which was exercised by this Ministry. Even now, it was surmise only as to whether it were casual or ubiquitous in the taking of such records. No one knew.

But P.N. 40 was in a mood to be reckless, and, anyway, there is little gain in stealing a book which is never read.

She loved those old poems, just as she hated the modern ones, which she had been forced to learn in the seminaries. There was *The Regulated Altar-Flame*, which every girl was expected to recite from memory on her fourteenth birthday. An interminable, sickening poem:

*"She hath no cause for secret shame,
The Regulated Altar-Flame."*

How she loathed the reiteration of that refrain! "*In fifteen years five children came.*" Probably they did. She didn't care, either way. Her mind was more occupied with a satisfactory adjustment of the conditions precedent to such advents.

It will be seen that the selection of such a book indicated that she was making little effort to prepare herself for the high destiny of the marriage for which she had been physically qualified by the discretions of four previous generations.

48 V.C., perilously watching from the evergreen shelter of a spruce-fir (it was a regulation that one of the two trees should be a conifer), came to that conclusion, and was encouraged to the temerity of revealing his presence to the unconscious girl.

Stated in advance of explanation, it may occasion more sur-

prise that 48 V.C. should have been able to read the title of the book from such a distance, than that she should have been encouraged by the thought of its licentiously headstrong monogamies. Yet the explanation is simple.

Like the muscles of the athlete, or the suppleness of the acrobat, his eyesight had been trained and perfected from his earliest childhood, to fit him for his intended occupation, which was to be that of an air-pilot. The theory of selection which had so destined him from infancy had been justified in its results, for, at the age of twenty-three, which was that of male maturity and marriage at this period, he had gained the rare honour of being appointed to one of the Condor patrol-planes, of which there were but twelve, and which exercised a final control and supervision over the airways of the world.

The Condors were single-seaters. They were in all ways self-sufficient. They were so swift that they could circle round an inter-continental liner as a swallow passes an express train. By right of office, they were exempt from the traffic laws of the air. All gave way before them when their sirens shrilled to the instruments in the ears of a thousand pilots, or their twin blue lights (interbarred with the warning pink) flashed, halcyon, through the night. Like shining minnows in the swaying weeds of the shallows, they twinkled nightly through the crowded planes of the port-ways as they swayed and strained rhythmically upon their anchors before the stresses of the equal wind. They could talk with each other through a separation of ten thousand miles. They could command, and the haughtiest liner must change its course, or pause motionless in the void. They were independent of extraneous fuel, and, when their pilot needed rest, or would survey his patrol from a steady point, they could rise above the highest levels of traffic, and hang stationary, or drift idly upon the wind, for a week if need be.

48 V.C. might have been bolder yet, had he known that this

last attribute of his Condor had impressed the imagination of P.N. 40 so much that the sheet of paper closed between the printed leaves held the commencement of a poem which she had been inspired to attempt in the quaint, archaic diction of the book she loved so foolishly, and in which she compared him to the frigate-bird (or was it the albatross?) of the Southern seas. Her mind had not been cumbered with useless knowledge, so she avoided nouns of exact identification.

*As that strong bird that dwells above the deep,
Lord of the wide wind-spaces of the sky,
Rests on sufficient wings in careless sleep,
Above the summer clouds securely high,
Unseen beneath the emulous surges leap,
Noise of contending navies comes not nigh. . . .*

She hadn't got any further. The construction was becoming conscious of some grammatical embarrassment, and, of course, it was really nonsense, like the pastoral of a seventeenth-century poet. There were no navies now, contentious or amicable. . . . Besides, she did not think of him most often as resting in the high solitudes of the air, but rather as he darted, meteor-bright and meteor-swift, among the crowded traffic of the night; or as he descended, bolt-like, to her rescue from the empty sky on the windy shore of Llangorse. . . .

She turned the pages idly to pause at *The Lady of Shalott*, with its quaint unreal echo of a misery kindred to, yet so different from, her own.

*And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two,
She hath no loyal knight. . . .*

. . . She knew the voice that called her name from the

shadow of the fir-branches, and her body thrilled with a sudden terror, and her heart beat chokingly. She did not know that she answered, but when 48 V.C. descended, and crossed the lawn towards her, she found words in an agony of fearful protest.

"Oh, but you must not—if you were seen—come inside—come quickly——"

In the shelter of her own room they looked at one another without speech for some moments.

Wild joy contended in her heart with utter terror at the audacity of his presence in that forbidden place, within ten miles of which no man had ever been known to trespass: where men only came when the bride-season had ended, and the apartments were delivered to the periodical fumigators. They stood under the shadow of a penalty that they could only guess, but which could be no less than the shattering of the lives they knew, if any life should be left them, not knowing but that an official of the M.I. might be recording every word and motion on the plates of his laboratory instrument in Hampstead, scarcely thirty miles away. . . . And he was the only man to whom she had ever spoken intimately, or on a basis of equality!

If there were less fear in his equal silence, there was an even greater diffidence. To find the vision of his hopeless dreams within the reach of his hand. . . . To have dared so much, and to be conscious of the utter madness of the offer that he had come to make. . . . To be sickeningly conscious of the pink-and-yellow band upon his arm, which proclaimed him unfit to consort with such as she, and his children after him. . . . O, unscalable heaven! . . .

She recovered her self-possession first, as a girl will.

"How did you find me?" she asked, in a very natural wonder.

"I saw your number," he said simply, and the words, which

explained everything, brought a flood of shame to her face, such as she had never known before. *Had she lifted her chin?* She had been taught from childhood that it is the lowest shame of womanhood: to lift her chin to a man—to show him the letter-number by which he may trace and find her. A woman may call with her eyes, she may beckon with her hand, and it may be no worse than idle teasing—but to lift her chin!

He saw the confusion he had caused, though he only vaguely comprehended it, for the teaching of the women's schools was outside his experience, and he added hastily:

"It was when I was lifting you out of the smash. I couldn't help seeing—really." And then, with a sudden honesty of laughter: "I didn't try, either."

She looked down silently, but without sign of resentment at this last audacious avowal, and he was emboldened to add:

"I would have found you, anyway, if I had had to search the world."

She gave him her eyes then for a moment, and thrilled deliciously at what she saw in those that met them. She half-lifted her hands, and threw them apart in a gesture of impotence. It was no time for love's finesses.

"It's no use," she said, "no use! You know it's useless. I can't think why you came."

Her voice reproached him, as though he had been guilty of a needless cruelty, but her words told him that which gave him courage to speak his purpose.

"Of course, it's of use, if you'll come. We've only got to wait for a bad night."

"Come where?" she said, with a direct brevity which is as commendable as it is rare in the mouths of women. There was a trembling dawn of hope behind the puzzled wonder of her eyes.

"To the forest reservation in Brazil," he answered, with

equal directness, but an inward terror as to how his suggestion would be received, which was very quickly ended.

"Of course I'd come," she said. "Rather. But how could we? If we got there, we should be traced for certain."

"I don't think so," he answered, with a stubborn determination to smother the doubt in his own mind. In abrupt and eager phrases he told her the plan which he had formed for her abduction.

Ten years before, after the draining of the great swamps of the Upper Amazon, the forests had been cleared of human life, partially destroyed and replanted, and then relegated to a solitude of fifty years, for certain experimental purposes, which are not without interest, but which would involve too much explanation for the brevity of this narrative to contain it.

If she could join him under the boundary of the aerodrome thirteen miles away, on a night of cloud and storm (the worse the better, for his purpose)—and, fortunately, the coming nights would be moonless—he did not doubt that they could escape unseen and unfollowed. He supposed (foolishly enough) that even the M.I. would be unlikely to have its attention concentrated upon them at such a time. He was, indeed, more concerned for the conditions of the wild life that they must be prepared to face together than for the perils of the journey in his familiar element.

Nor did she think much of the danger of the flight itself, though she had a greater fear and a greater knowledge of the powers that ruled them. She thought of the flashing speed of Condor 5 . . . they would escape in the night unnoticed, and who should follow? They would be almost there in the morning!

"I'm afraid," he said, with his irrepressible truthfulness, "it won't be as easy as you think. We shall have to try it in a Kestrel."

"In a Kestrel!" Wonder contended with dismay in the voice with which she answered, and there was good cause for her protest.

Everyone knew the Kestrels. They were the only form of plane that everyone was trained to handle. They were fool-proof and simple. When they had risen, they would not readily descend, without deliberate manipulations, too low for a parachute to be used safely. But they were built for short flights on the afternoon of a summer day; they were forbidden to go over any considerable stretch of water: and though the difficulty of fuel did not arise, and they were swallow-swift in a quiet air, they were unfit either in strength or power of flight for any ocean passage, where their parachutes would be useless. Their speed and direction were controlled by a degree of muscular exertion that made a prolonged flight an arduous enterprise.

To consider one for such a purpose was as though a gnat should calculate its miles of motion, spinning in sunlit clusters, and conclude its fitness for a non-stop flight across the breadth of England.

Yet there was no other way. 48 V.C. had judged coolly enough that, even could he descend in his own machine and take the girl unobserved, its disappearance would lead to a world search, and an almost certain finding. He might not even be able to destroy it effectively, or to hide it among the forest trees, before its location would have been observed, and their fate be certain. He must make excuse to put up Condor 5 for repairs, and when on the free leave which would result, he could easily have one of the very numerous Kestrels so placed that it could start unnoticed in the night.

There was one point in their favour. The Kestrels, though small, had a roomy car, being built for summer picnics in the air, whereas the Condors were for work and speed, and had a seating space for one only. Also, with sufficient skill (which

he must contrive—and who could fail with such reward on landing?) the Kestrels were capable of a very high speed indeed, though it was seldom attempted. But, most important of all, he intended his plan to succeed by its incredibility. If the flight were known, and the disappearance of the Kestrel discovered, no one (he thought) would dream of looking for them more than a hundred miles away.

Yet it was with a natural doubt that he looked at P.N. 40 as he confessed his plan. Suicide was not a popular enterprise, even under the conditions of life which have been vaguely indicated, and no man can invite a young lady he scarcely knows to join him in a very probable drowning without some natural doubt as to the nature of her reply.

But P.N. 40 did not hesitate. Perhaps she did not realise the utter madness of the project as clearly as she would have done had she had a wider experience of the air. Perhaps she had a confidence in this audacious lover which might not have been felt by a more indifferent auditor.

“Oh, yes, if you think a Kestrel’s best. You ought to know,” she answered easily. “But you’d better go now or we’ll neither of us go anywhere. The disc’s changed colour twice already.”

She pointed to the signal which had twice reminded her of her remissness in approaching the morning meal—a remissness of which she had not been guilty in a score of previous years, and which could not continue for many seconds longer without some emphatic interruption resulting.

48 V.C. turned reluctantly. He wanted to make clearer arrangements for meeting. He wanted permission to come again, if the chance should offer. He wanted . . . But the girl had no mind for a needless peril.

“Come again? Of course not. Are you quite mad? Of course I shall find it. I’m not a fool, really. The first night the indicator shows below two-seven, I shall be there at half-

past three. You needn't look for me earlier. If the nights are fine till the twenty-eighth, I'll come then anyway. . . . You'd better go while the sky's clear."

He did not want to go. . . . He wanted to say good-bye, and, lacking practice, he was not sure how to begin. A night passage to Brazil seemed a less formidable enterprise.

He looked uncertainly at the empty sky, and back into the room—and found it empty also.

Then he went.

P.N. 40 might be willing to risk her life for a lover. She might (which seemed to her a more serious consequence) be prepared to abandon the amenities of civilised life for his companionship. She was not in the least disposed to risk everything which was at stake because he could not understand that it was time to go.

P.N. 40 entered the breakfast-hall bravely enough, though she was conscious of the puzzled wonder of a hundred pairs of eyes that were directed upon her, and her heart might well have failed at the thought that she had already drawn inquiry, which might so easily turn to suspicion, in her direction.

She was three minutes late, in a world in which unpunctuality was as rare as manslaughter.

There had been a period of many centuries during which men had learnt to rely upon mechanical instruments, not only for recording, but for notifying them of the passage of time, and had become consequently almost insensitive to its durations.

Then a country schoolmaster, a Mr. Alfred Borton, had immortalised himself, and revolutionised the organisation of society, by observing that, if he established a habit of feeding his flock of geese at seven minutes to four, they would appear at his back door at that time, neither before nor after, with an exact punctuality. He had reflected that what is possible to a

goose should not be impossible to a man, and he had first experimented with one of his own family, a child of three years, who had learnt that it must leave its nursery at exact periods, of which no indication was given, for an adjoining meal-room, if it were to obtain the quantities of food that it required or the delicacies that it coveted. It was found that children so trained could achieve automatic habits which would not vary more than from seven to thirteen seconds from exact punctuality. They would observe the regularities of an ordered household with no more conscious thought than they would give to the separate movements of the limbs that bore them to the waiting table.

It was natural, therefore, that Instructress 90 should have been alarmed and puzzled as three successive minutes passed, at the end of each of which she had given the signal, which should have been so needless, and which, she knew, must have discoloured and agitated the warning disc which was fitted into every bedroom to deal with such an emergency, before P.N. 40 approached the table, unaware of how successfully she was concealing the perturbations of her secret mind.

The Instructress was a lady of seventy, wearing the white dress of widowhood, below the rose-pink collarette of honour which was the badge of the Sixth-Grade Women. The four red stars on her right sleeve were the number of her living children. There were no grey discs of the dead. She was now a tall, somewhat angular woman, with a rather long nose and a high crown of greying hair. In younger days she had been a famous athlete. She had been born in the early days of the Second Era. She believed in it absolutely.

The glance she gave to the approaching girl was shrewd, but kindly. She guessed that some abnormal mental disturbance must have occasioned so startling a breach of ordered living. It was not unusual for her to have to deal with such a difficulty among the lower girls, though she had never known it to occur

to one of her own grade, nor to have so disconcerting an evidence. A Sixth-Grade girl was usually too sensible of the honour which was before her. Also, they were not numerous. This year, P.N. 40 was the only one at the table of Instructress 90.

"What has happened?" she asked, as P.N. 40 lifted her chin courteously, and seated herself at her right-hand.

"I was thinking . . . I forgot."

The Instructress considered this impossible answer.

"I trust it was not done deliberately? After the scene of last night——"

"Oh, no, Instructress. I am very sorry. I didn't mean it at all. It won't happen again."

There was evident sincerity in the voice that answered. A sincerity of regret which was unmistakable. And the tone was more satisfactory than had been usual from P.N. 40. The matter must be reported. It was too serious for a mere reprimand to condone it. But it might be less so than that she had feared. Perhaps an instinct of rebellion had culminated in this outrageous breach of etiquette, and had produced a natural reaction. She said no more.

P.N. 40 had to exercise a more severe self-discipline to avoid the friendlier queries of her right-hand neighbour. R.E. 7 was a rather heavily-built girl, with very light hair and small eyes. She was wholesome and healthy, but not outwardly attractive. She wore the badge of the Fifth-Grade only, her lack of physical beauty having excluded her from the highest rank, to which she would otherwise have been eligible. The two girls had been at the same seminary, and there was a tested and confident friendship between them. P.N. 40 had been the captain of the Hockey Team which had won the World Championship for three successive years, at Budapest, at Stockholm, and at Pretoria. The success of this team was commonly attributed to P.N. 40 herself, who, from her forward

position of inside-left, had shot more goals than had been credited to a single player since the present championship had been established. But P.N. 40 knew that the stability of the team, and the bulk of her own opportunities, came from the rock-like defence and the skilful feeding of the centre-half-back behind her. In other ways, too numerous to detail, too different for brevity, she had learnt the reliability of her companion. She would have told her all, when the opportunity came, with an absolute confidence both in the reticence and the loyalty of the friendship that would receive it. But the fear of the M.I. was upon her. The spoken word might not be safe, in whatever privacy; even the articulated thought. . . .

R.E. saw that her curiosity was unwelcome. She became silent, and P.N. 40 was quickly joining in a foolish discussion which arose among the lower-grade girls as to why the law did not allow an uneven number of wives (the gradations were six, four, two, one, one-quarter and one-sixth), and whether the single wife allocated to Grade Four infringed this rule—a discussion which was allowed good-humouredly by the Instructress, until it touched the borders of impropriety, when she intervened with the silencing remark that such subjects were more suitable for the class-room than the breakfast-table, and that she would deal with it sufficiently at a future session, when the Routines of Matrimony would be the subject of the day.

The days passed without any disturbing incident, but also without the break of weather for which P.N. 40 was watching with a concealed anxiety, until the 27th of April, when the skies clouded heavily and a cold tempestuous wind, veering unsteadily from one point of the compass to another, resulted in the air warning which brought all the pleasure planes to the crowded anchorages, and caused the freight planes to descend to the lower levels which the pleasure planes had

vacated. Only the mile-high continental liners continued their scheduled way, indifferent to any elemental discord.

That afternoon, Condor 5 descended to its aerodrome, reporting a strain on the hinge-expander of the falling-tail, which would take two days to repair.

That night, at 11.45, when for three-quarters of an hour the long lines of the sleeping-bungalows had been dark and silent, P.N. 40, bareheaded, but clothed in a suit of water-proofs, and with her most precious possessions slung from her shoulders in an oilskin satchel, opened her bedroom window, and stepped quietly out into the blackness of the driving rain.

The method by which the grazing-park, which surrounded the great circle of the sleeping-bungalows, was drained and irrigated does not concern us, except to remark that it simplified the difficulty of finding a twelve-mile way through the blinding rain which she had never traversed before, and for which her only guidance was the red lights of the landing-platforms of the aerodrome she was seeking.

This aerodrome was, in fact, no more than a depot for pleasure Kestrels, and a government repairing-shed for planes of the lighter patterns. It had no accommodation except for such as could easily come to earth, or which were so built that they could settle on the landing-platforms. The flat fields of Middlesex offered no security of anchorage for the larger airships, such as can be found in the Devon coombes, or the valleys of Wales, where the largest plane may inflate its buoys and swing on shortened cables in defiance of storms from whatever quarter. The nearest airpost (and that an inferior one) was in the Chiltern Hills.

Yet, however small in comparison with the major ports, the aerodrome was of sufficient extent to make the place of appointment somewhat vague, even had there been light to aid her. But P.N. 40 had spoken truly enough when she said that she

was no fool, and she now applied a simple logic to the problem before her. He would know the path by which she would come, and she was here on the night, and at the time, she had promised. She did not want to advertise her presence. Secrecy was vital. She looked across the phosphorescent luminosity of the boundary, waiting in the darkness for any voice or movement to call her.

But nothing stirred. There was only the scream of the wind through the plane-platforms, and the nearer rattle of the rain.

Should she call aloud, and perhaps bring the discovery which would be ruin?

Should she return, to lose the wild hope which she had hidden during those waiting days? Perhaps to find that her absence had been discovered, and to meet some terrible or shameful penalty?

She could not wait here for ever. . . .

Had he forgotten his promise?

Perhaps he thought the storm too bad for so perilous an adventure.

Perhaps he was asleep and unheeding, or far away in his Condor, resting.

What did she know of men, that she should trust him with her life so lightly? Sin, as she had been taught from childhood. Folly, with its inevitable fruit of pain.

So her thoughts warred, while she stood patient and resolute in the storm.

Lightning flickered, and a dark shape showed, not fifty yards over the boundary.

Surely a Kestrel; and Kestrels are not left out in such positions without reason through a night of storm.

She had been a fool, after all.

But why had he given no signal?

She must have stood so silently that he had supposed that she had not come.

So they must have waited, each for the other, not fifty yards apart!

And the vital moments were passing.

Thinking thus, she went confidently forward.

She came to the dim bulk of the Kestrel, for such it was. She had been right so far.

"*Forty-eight*," she whispered, but there was no answer.

Fearful, and trembling with an anxiety which she could control no longer, she felt for the lighting-switch, and illuminated the interior of the car.

It was rain-soaked, and empty.

The significance was too clear for any hope to survive. If this were the chosen car, it would at least have had a store of provisions and water, if not a hundred things that they would need in their forest solitudes. . . .

She heard the beat of the balance-wings as Condor 5 came to the ground beside her. It came down with no pretence of concealment. Its landing-lights shone through the rain. She was aware of the wail of the signal-sirens, and of long arms of light that rose, stabbing the storm.

"Quick," said the voice of 48 V.C., "heave these things in. We've got two minutes, with luck."

In the barbarous period of the twentieth century, it had been customary to choose a Premier for his capacity to talk loudly enough to engage the attention of a numerous audience, vaguely enough to avoid the danger of any absolute statement, and cunningly enough to conceal the emptiness of his declarations. Having these qualifications, he might be a lawyer or an iron-founder, or (and more probably) a man of University education, who was destitute of any practical knowledge and without any specialised occupation.

In the Second Eugenic Era such a leadership would have been regarded with an astonishment which might not be

entirely unmerited. A government has many responsibilities. It must have many departments. But, of all these, the most important must surely be the care of the physique of the race itself, for the benefit of which the other departments exist, and a man without expert knowledge on that greatest of earthly subjects could be little fit to guide its destinies further.

Professor Philphit (66 D.T.), who held that office in the ninety-third year of that era, was so conscious of the importance of the subject in which he had specialised very brilliantly that he had himself taken charge of the Physical and Selection Department, which had never been more vigorously administered than when under his enthusiastic direction.

He had himself shown, in his well-known monograph *On the Psychology of the Adolescent*, that the atavistic impulses of youth can be controlled without too serious difficulty, providing that there be no discernible possibility of their realisation. A hope, however slender, that the law of allocation could be successfully evaded would be the cause of multitudinous unrest, which might require a stern severity of repression or would cause the precarious foundations of the youthful civilisations which he controlled to shake beneath him.

It followed that every instance of erratic contact, however casual or trivial, between the youths and girls of the separated seminaries was regarded with the importance of a seed from which a crop might develop which would choke the healthy growth of the entire community. Professor Philphit had given orders that such instances should be reported instantly to himself, and the escapade in which P.N. 40 had been involved with P.T. 69 had naturally come before him. It had been shown that P.T. 69 had been primarily responsible for that incident, and she had been degraded accordingly, but P.N. 40 had escaped any serious penalty, though her subsequent conduct had been very closely watched, as had that of the youthful pilot who had effected her rescue.

The report that the girl had been late for breakfast, without any credible explanation, within a fortnight of the Branding Festival, had caused an instant requisition upon the Ministry of Insight to expose the truth of her conduct.

The apparatus of the Ministry of Insight, at this period, had reached a point of excellence of which it was difficult to take the fullest advantage.

It was no longer obstructed by intervening walls, nor dependent upon visible light-rays for the photographs which it obtained. In theory, it could, and did, record every incident of the lives of every individual from Penzance to Wick, and it could reproduce every audible sound they made from its records, not only of the moving lips, but of the diaphragm from which it came.

But the very extent and quality of this success produced its own difficulty. How could so vast an accumulation of records be stored, tabulated, developed? There were difficulties not merely in their use, but even in their retention. Without the application of a newly-discovered element of comparative rarity, they faded within a few hours of their production.

The result was that the records actually retained related to events of national importance, to specimen records of selected lives, and to periodic photography of the interiors of the bodies of the nation, this census being taken at intervals of six or seven years, without public knowledge of the time of its incidence.

The demand for the exposure of the actions of *P.N. 40* on the occasion of her unpunctuality was made within seven minutes of the circumstance coming to the Premier's knowledge, and within twenty-four hours of its occurrence. Everything possible was done to supply his requirements, but the result was incomplete, although sufficiently dreadful in its disclosures to prove the use, indeed the necessity, of these records, if anyone then living had been sufficiently foolish to question it.

The picture of the bedroom itself had faded into a dim scene of two figures which did not appear to move about more than a little, or to approach very closely. Nothing could be recovered of speech, or even of expression or gesture. But there was a clear record of 48 V.C. leaving the window, and making his covert return to the aerodrome. The expression of his face was that of one who has been suitably rebuked for a very shameful trespass.

Considering this sinister episode, Professor Philphit gave instructions for a special photograph of P.N. 40 to be taken, and being satisfied therefrom that she had, at least, preserved her physical integrity, he decided to do nothing further for the moment, but to watch the delinquents very closely until she should have passed into the care of her selected husband.

The reports he received were satisfactory until the morning of the 27th of April. P.N. 40 was punctual in attendance at her meals and classes. She seemed placid and cheerful. She took an intelligent interest in the instructions she was receiving in the Seven Duties of Marriage. 48 V.C. was occupied on his patrol, and had shown no disposition to descend to the aerodrome, nor consciousness of the existence of P.N. 40. There had certainly been no communication between them. Professor Philphit began to hope that the incident might pass without consequence. If so, it would be best for many reasons that nothing should be done to revive it.

When, on the morning of the 27th, he heard that 48 V.C. had descended with a report of damage to his machine, he was cautious, but not alarmed. He inquired as to the nature of the alleged damage, and learnt that it was certainly genuine. It did not render the machine unfit for flight, but it might render landing dangerous in a rough wind. 48 V.C. had been right to report it. It might have been wiser to do so earlier. Certainly, it would have been wrong to continue flying in the storm which had now arisen, with such a defect unremedied.

All this seemed right enough, but the Premier took no risks. He ordered a police officer to remain in the company of 48 V.C. until he should return to the air, and to report telepathically to his private instrument, to avoid the delay of communicating through the Ministry of Insight, should any suspicious circumstance require it. It is to his lasting honour that the possibility did not enter his mind that P.N. 40 could be so shameless as to go out into the night to seek her lover.

It followed that when 48 V.C. strolled into the mess-room, having (very fortunately) already arranged, on some plausible pretext, for a carefully-selected Kestrel to be left for the next twenty-four hours near the boundary of the aerodrome, he found a certain Police Inspector, 17 T.P., with whom he already had some acquaintance, had developed a friendliness which he was very disinclined to welcome, but which he found it impossible to shake off.

After some hours of abortive fencing, when the necessity for obtaining supplies for the Kestrel was becoming desperately urgent, he attacked his persecutor with a direct inquiry.

"You seem very fond of me to-day, Inspector. Have you been told to watch me?"

"Yes," said the Inspector.

"Why?" asked 48 V.C.

"I don't know."

"Are you reporting everything I do?"

"Yes."

"Everything I say?"

"No."

"Well, that's something."

48 V.C. had exceptionally good nerves, or he would not have been a Condor pilot at twenty-three. He showed no sign of more annoyance than would be natural under such circumstances. Very quickly, he thought of an audacious expedient.

"Well, if you've got to come around with me, you might

lend me a hand. I'm going to load up Condor 5, ready to fly as soon as the repair is finished."

"She'd fly all right now, if you wanted to get away from me," said the Inspector.

"Yes, but I don't," said 48 V.C.

He commenced, with his companion's help, to load the well of the Condor with an unusually well-assorted store of food and water. He thought of tools, and many miscellaneous things, which might be useful in the air. He explained that he never knew what accidents he might have to succour, or in what distant places.

"Are you reporting all this?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes," said the Inspector.

"You might tell them that it looks as though I mean to disappear altogether."

"You couldn't do that," said the Inspector. "Not in a Condor, anyway."

"I suppose not," said 48 V.C., laughing. "I'd better alter my plans."

The Inspector laughed also. He did not take him seriously. They both knew that in the chart-room of the Ministry of the Air the location of every machine with a metallically-responsive hull could be told at any moment, within half a mile in either altitude or direction. Only the Kestrels were built of the commoner metals, and their little flutterings were outside the knowledge, as they were beneath the notice, of the chart-room records.

It was after 3 a.m. when 48 V.C. rose from his berth in the dormitory and commenced dressing.

"What's the game?" inquired the Inspector, rising with an equal alertness.

"It's the weather," said 48 V.C. "I think the things in the Condor may need moving."

"Are you gone crazy?" said the Inspector. He began to

understand why he had been detailed to watch this young pilot, in whom insanity was developing so rapidly. A sad case. He followed him out into the storm.

"Inspector," said 48 V.C. from his seat in the Condor, "it's a bad night for flying. You weren't told to come with me, were you? You'd better go back and report."

"I can report without going back," said the Inspector grimly. He wiped the rain from his eyes to watch the Condor as it rose abruptly into the air, and circled back to the farther side of the aerodrome. There was nothing here for which prompt action might be needed. The next moment his whistle shrilled through the darkness. For the last news he had sent had closely followed an alarming telepathic report from Instructress 90 that the room of P.M. 40 was empty, and orders had come to arrest the fugitives by any method, without regard to their lives, if they should attempt resistance, or their flight continue.

There were running feet within ten yards as the Kestrel felt the impulse of the release, and rose clear of the hands that clutched in vain in the rain-drenched darkness for the mooring-ropes, which they guessed that she must be trailing behind her.

"Won't they follow?" she asked, as he switched off the car-light, and the darkness closed them. Harshly, through the noises of the storm, there came the useless barking of an Elston gun.

"Not in Condor 5," he answered. "I've seen to that. They may in others, but they won't have them out for five minutes yet, and how will they find us then?"

He laughed excitedly, and then became tense and cool, as he saw a streak of light that searched the sky turn from white to orange-red as he watched it. The Kestrel swerved to his steering, so that the girl was thrown against the side of the car in the darkness.

"What's the matter?" she said, laughing at the mishap, in contempt of a bruised shoulder. "Do you usually steer like that?"

"I may do it worse," he answered. "Don't talk now. Get the straps on quickly. Don't switch the light."

She knew that it was no time for talking, as she groped in the dark for the first strap she could find which would serve to hold her in the swaying plane.

Overhead, the red light moved incessantly, probing the night.

Flying low, with frantic dashes, right or left, as the blind search pursued them, the Kestrel dodged like a snipe, till, perilously low, it passed over the great circle of the sleeping-bungalows, and the public halls which they surrounded, with the lighted tower in the centre.

P.N. 40 spoke at last, with a natural question.

"Did it matter so much if they saw us? They knew we were there." She was puzzled, realising that they must have circled round, while they might have been fifty miles away.

He answered: "I didn't think they'd have done that. We're safe now, if we fly low for a time, but I had to get the rise of the land between us. No, the searchlight wouldn't have mattered. Not while it was white. But the orange-red is meant to kill. We should have shrivelled up like a cinder if it had once settled upon us. . . . Do you mind?"

He spoke with a sudden contrition for the reckless perils into which he had lured her. . . . Her of whom he had dreamed, unhoping. . . . This stranger who touched his knee.

She did not answer in words, but he had switched on the car lights, and her eyes spoke clearly.

"We shall be steadier now, for a time," he said, "if the wind holds as it is." They began to plane upwards. Side by side, they settled themselves into the seats in such comfort as the space allowed. For ecstatic breathless moments they forgot

everything but themselves: the wonder of the new companionship; the joy of the distant goal.

The speed increased to the maximum. They knew now that they were out over the Channel. The light in the open car made the surrounding blackness more absolute. There was no steadiness in the wind, which drove gustily. Out of the darkness the storm came in heaving oceans of air through which the flying speck of the little Kestrel fought, and swayed, and faltered. It was colder now, and the rain had become sleet in their faces.

"They won't find us?" she asked.

"Not they," he said confidently. He felt fairly sure of that, during the darkness at least—though he had been startled by the use of the orange ray, and the ruthless purpose which it showed. He meant to be very far across the sea before the light should aid them.

But he knew that there was an even greater peril in the flight itself—a peril which he could only guess, for no one had ever put a Kestrel to such a test before . . . and in such weather as this, with the length of the Atlantic before them!

"Can I help?" she said, after a time.

"Not yet," he answered. "I can keep on for a long while yet. I'll tell you when I get tired. You'd better sleep now."

Soaring still, the straining body of the little Kestrel fought its bitter way through the storm, and she slept beside him. Should it fail, as at any moment it might should the frail parts snap at pressures which they had not been made to meet—well, it would be useless to wake her. He knew they could not go on for very long like this. There might be better weather if he still went upward. He knew that he had reached a level where there was an added danger in the darkness. Any moment an air-liner, shouldering its smooth contemptuous passage through the night, might strike them broken-winged to the water, and pass on, unaware of their triviality. But it was the only chance

they had. His foot pressed harder on the soaring-lever, and the wing-beats quickened. They went upward through the storm.

There was a murmur of protest in the Telescenic Laboratory.

"They want us to *find a Kestrel*—in the night!"

"Where?"

"Within fifty miles of Brentwood."

"It can't be done. . . . There's no responsive metal in a Kestrel. How can we tell where to look?"

"Why can't they wait till morning? We can't miss it when it comes down. A Kestrel can't go far."

"They say it first circled low, and then rose, and headed south."

"Well, we've got to try."

"*South?* It can't go far that way. Does it want to fall into the Channel?"

The operators might murmur, but the words of protest were over in ten seconds, and already the crackling sound of the batteries and the droning of the great discs showed that the search had started.

For twenty minutes the swift miles of magnetic air passed before the eyes of the operators, luminous as though unaware either of storm or darkness, before they found the speck they sought in the immensity of the night.

Nearly two miles up, they reported, heading south-west for the Channel.

Can it last? came the query.

It may be blown back. It is facing the storm. But it is making for the open sea.

Can it live, if it does not return to land?

On the screen, the Chief Operator studied the driving blur of the storm for some minutes further before he answered the query.

A wind-tossed Kestrel showed faintly.

Lightning flickered around it.

Knowing that it had no electric control, he looked for it to crumple and disappear, but it still kept onwards.

Its course was rapid, but so erratic at times that they had difficulty in keeping the sights upon it.

He noticed that it was still climbing upwards, between the buffetings of the storm.

Then he saw that it was falling—falling fast. Was it injured? He thought it righted for a moment, and then he lost it.

They searched for it to the limits of height which they could reach, and downward till they skimmed the blackness of the heaving sea, but they could not find it again.

Did it matter whether it were already beneath the waters, or a wind-blown atom in the screaming heights? There could be only one end. He ordered them to give up the useless search.

He reported: *It is out of sight, and is probably sunk already. If it be still flying, it must return, or fail and perish. It is unfit for such a flight, and the air to southward is foul with crossing storms.*

He spoke of failure, not understanding that they had triumphed already. For all men die, but few live.

Far up, far over the Atlantic wastes, the little craft, with its two warm-hearted lovers, beat upwards through the snow-swept night, upwards against the fury of the freezing wind, still upward . . . upward . . . to over-ride the storm.

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Automata

THE Annual Meeting of the British Association was being held at Sheffield, and the learned members were assembled to hear the Presidential Address of Dr. Tilwin, who had shaken the foundations of scientific complacency at the Brighton gathering of the previous year, by casual allusion to the "two obvious fallacies in the theory of Relativity".

He was too eminent a mathematician to be disregarded, and the scientific world had waited impatiently for a justification of the audacious challenge, which had appeared only a few weeks earlier, and concerning which none of the nine persons in England who professed (rightly or not) to understand the assaulted theory had yet ventured an opinion.

Now it was hoped that the new President would use the occasion for a further elucidation of the startling heresy which he had put forward. Were they to be persuaded back to the childish levels of Newton, or led to unimagined heights of mathematical complexity?

Even the popular belief that two and two make four might not be left unchallenged. All that is certain is that they have done so very frequently. The rule is not therefore proved to be invariable, nor, could it be shown that it has been so in the past, would it be a logical consequence that it must always be so in the future. . . .

But Dr. Tilwin made no further assault upon Einstein's incomprehensible stronghold.

He commenced, instead, to direct the attention of his audience to the results of modern scientific discoveries as they had materialised themselves in the changed conditions of human life, and then, more specifically, as they had developed

the instruments of production and labour, first substituting inorganic for organic sources of energy, and then inorganic for organic media for its practical implement.

The assembly listened at first with a somewhat tepid interest. They understood that the age of machinery was being eulogised, as an almost necessary compliment to the occupations of the city in which they met, and they expected that the address would pass on to other more disputable or fruitful fields, but they stirred themselves with a quickened observation as their President continued to develop the topic he had commenced, and to conduct it, with unemotional logic, to its sombre end.

"The earlier inventors of mechanical apparatus," he was now saying, "asserted confidently that their advantages to mankind would result in an increase of population, and this fallacy was supported, for a time, by the fact that large numbers were enabled to congregate in centres round which there was no sufficient area of fertile land to feed them.

"Yet, even then, the writing was on the wall. Around these urban areas stretched mile after mile of green countryside on which a healthy peasantry shrank and dwindled as the powers of steam and petrol were substituted for that of human muscles. Gone were the merry crowds of the English hay-fields, and the dead hands that had wielded the harvest-sickle had no descendants.

"When it was found that the few who were left could not, under the new conditions, grow the food which was their only merchandise, in successful competition with the supplies of distant lands, their countrymen were indifferent. Let them starve or cease. War brought famine; and there was a short-lived reaction. Then the spectacle of a race destroying its most virile elements for a delusion of profit was resumed, and the declension continued.

"It is true that the rapid disappearance of the horse was

observed as a direct consequence of the substitution of inorganic for organic energy, but its significance was disregarded.

“Even to-day, there may be few of us who have realised that it is not the horse alone which is destined to disappear before the advance of a higher energistic form—that we ourselves in a few generations—probably in a very few generations—are destined to follow. . . . Yet the process of our destruction has commenced already.

“It is true that fears have been expressed lest the advance of knowledge should provide us with explosive substances, with bacterial cultures, or vaporous poisons, by which we might contrive our own annihilation. But it is difficult to suppose that an over-ruling Providence would permit our disappearance before we have fulfilled the high destiny of our evolution, and have occupied the earth with such a race of automata as will continue to function and to develop—to what ends we can only dimly imagine—without the need of our continued service.

“. . . I have said that the process of our destruction has commenced already. Already preparing us to face not individual but racial extinction without excessive protest, or too keen regret. The old ideal of the home is fading. The old superstition of the value or necessity of children is leaving, if it has not already left, our minds.

“Our fathers thought no shame to let the plough-horse die, finding that the power of steam could be successfully substituted for a creature which had the pains and pleasures, the impulses and imperfections, of a sentient life. Our children think no shame to say that they will have a child the less that they may have an auto-car the more. Some of the machines that we have designed already are employed in manufacturing appliances to frustrate the natural fertility of the race.

“The day of the substitution of the machine for the human

body is not a vision of the future, a speculation of the philosopher. It is already upon us.

“. . . It was the control of motion which first betrayed us. We constructed machines which would move our possessions. Then our machines commenced to manufacture others which were adapted to move ourselves. The population of these machines has increased until they can be counted in millions; we are content to climb into them, and to be moved backwards and forwards continually, as gnats whirl in the sun.

“. . . But, as yet, we may observe with some satisfaction that they are dependent upon our service. They cannot move unless we put the food into their bellies, and we can stop or turn them with a motion of our hand.

“Yet how long can this balance of power continue? How long shall we be able to observe this pause of uncertainty, during which it may be hard to say whether the man exists for the machine, or the machine for the man?

“Already the tide is on the turn.

“It is not only that automata have been constructed which in clumsy, limited ways can perform some human actions, or produce some vocal sounds.

“It is more significant that the number of men who are employed in every factory decreases as its machines become more numerous.

“The capstan lathe may require a workman's individual attention. The automatic lathe is capable of great variety of independent operations, and a team of these, industriously occupied, may be content with the menial service of a single attendant.

“The humility of science will hesitate to prophesy the detailed incidence of that which may be foreseen in its inevitable outline, but it may not be a too-rash guess that the industrial workman and the domestic servant will be the first to disappear from their places in the national life. Some few

may remain for generations, even for centuries. But is it reasonable to suppose that the nation will continue altruistically to support the persons and families of industrial workers who are no longer needed? For themselves there may be some generous provision to avert the euthanasia which would be the evident economic expedient for the aged horse, or the dog of which a woman has grown tired, but would it be tolerable that we should allow the propagation of their useless children?

“Or consider, how many would there be who would continue the employment of the domestic servant, idle, wasteful, dirty and unreliable as they too often are, merely that the population might not diminish, when there would be automatic substitutes available, which would not only be free from such faults, but would require no ‘evenings out’, no annual increase of wages, and could be put away if the house were closed, without the continued supply of food or fuel? . . .”

At this point Sir Ireton Mount had looked at the illustrious author of Sheerluck Soames, who was seated beside him. They shook their massive heads in a troubled wonder. Their colossal intellects told them that such developments were logical enough. But why had the spirits given no hint to their faithful servants? They went out to consult Pheneas.

Bellorina was a woman of a weak sentimentality, which had caused her to expend the free allotment of seventeen major units of energy, which was the maturity portion which every woman of the community was entitled to claim on allocation, in the erection of a personal home, modelled on the expiring traditions of the aborigines of the twentieth century. It was built of oblong red bricks, with a tiled and sloping roof. Its rooms were of irregular sizes, and were disfigured by many ingle-nooks, “exposed” oak beams, and the remains of a bread-oven. It had a feeding-table and quaint crockery utensils, instead of the usual nutrition-pumps. Even the automata

which waited upon her were of the oldest patterns, finished in imitation of the living maid-servants of that remote period to which her mind reverted. The outside of the house was patched with flowers and shorn grass, and groups of senseless, insanitary trees. Appropriately enough, after what she knew to be the way of the ultra-æsthetic Georgians, she had called it Daisy Villa.

Today, Bellorina had invited three female acquaintances, who, like herself, were not on the mating-lists of the week, to join her at an "afternoon tea" so that the illusion of savagery might be completely realised.

They were all allocated women, with a full knowledge of life, and sure to talk freely and scandalously when they got together.

Bora-Ann came a few minutes before the others, as the dignity of her suffix required, and waited without complaint when the door (which should have opened in response to the secret word of invitation spoken in F sharp) remained closed till she had pressed the push, and an automaton, dressed in black, with a white apron and cap, had promptly responded.

She did not falter in her courteous approbation, even when a child, with the appearance of a girl of five or six years, met her in the hall, and held out a timid hand, saying: "Good-afternoon, Mrs. Bora-Ann," in a shy Georgian voice. She did not know what "Mrs." meant, for the folly of studying past history was no longer general, but she understood that this was the sort of thing which was supposed to happen in the old barbarous days, and she stooped good-humouredly for the small lifted arms to go round her neck, and kissed the soft cheek kindly.

The queer little room was windowed, but a loggia reduced its light, and an obsolete electric bulb glowed from the ceiling, for it was winter twilight without. The corners of the room were in shadow, and Bora-Ann, who had never known an

actual darkness, controlled her fear with some difficulty, as she fitted herself, with commendable agility, into the wicker-chair which her hostess indicated for her reception.

"How sweet everything is," she said kindly. "It was almost like a real flesh-child in the hall. . . !" Then her voice changed to a half-fearful excited note, as the thought came: "*It wasn't a real flesh-child, was it?*"

The question remained unanswered for a moment, for Mira and Scarletta came in together, and chairs had to be drawn out, and their uses indicated; then Bellorina answered, with a laugh which was not free from embarrassment: "Oh, no; I'm not quite so mad as that. . . . Not in the hall, anyway. You couldn't tell what would happen. But it's a very good imitation. I've got two, really. They can say almost anything, and are never seriously disobedient. They oil themselves, and charge each other's batteries at bed-time. They're really no trouble at all.

"I was speaking to someone yesterday," said Mira, who was always indefinite as to her sources of information, "who told me that the man she had last week told her that he had had a woman the week before who told him that she knew a woman—I can't be sure, but I believe it's that blue-banded scratch-cat at Pity-Rise. It couldn't be anyone else in our country. They say she's so coarse that she had the same man twice in one year when the lists were altered—I told Biltie last night that I'm sure it's she, and Biltie told Agra-Ann this morning that he knows it for a fact—who had a flesh-child five years ago, and the woman said she believes it's still there."

"I dare say it's true enough," said Scarletta, hopefully. "They say that flesh-children are almost common in some parts of Italy. I don't think that anyone has more than one, and, of course, they have two or three automata for them to play with. But it's an endless trouble to all concerned. Flesh-children are

dirty things, and they won't keep the same size, and sometimes they die altogether. They say you can't imagine what has to be done for them the first year or two, to keep them going at all. I suppose there have to be a few somewhere, but it's hard to think that a decent woman would have one."

"It isn't only the coarseness of it," Mira answered. "It's difficult to understand any woman being so silly. The automata make each other so well now, that there's no excuse for anyone messing with a flesh-child. Since the mathematicians perfected the law of the Automatic Balance of Deviation . . ."

"I don't understand mathematics," her hostess interposed, "and I know Scarletta hates them. Of course, Bora-Ann . . ." she smiled deferentially at the woman whose suffix placed her among the intellectual aristocracy of her time—"but there isn't any real need for us humans to worry about such things now, is there? Sartie told me that the automata can work out problems that no man could possibly even attempt. He says it's because they're not distracted with feelings and jealousies, and help each other instead of quarrelling. And they don't get tired, and make mistakes. Sartie says we shan't be needed much longer, even to make them. . . . Of course, evolution's right enough, and I know I'm silly, but it all seems rather dreadful to me. I wish I'd got a body that lasts, or could have a new valve when the old one wears out. And . . . I know you'll laugh at me, but I almost wish I'd got a flesh-child, or even two. The automata are both very sweet and loving, and they're no trouble at all, but it must be rather fun to watch them change as they grow, and . . . to comfort them when they cry."

Bora-Ann moved uneasily. She was a guest, and she would be sorry to hear anything which might involve report and repression. She resisted an inclination to change the subject. She felt that it would be cowardly to do so. Such a position should be handled kindly, but firmly.

"I don't think," she answered, "that you quite realise what you say. The unhealthy atmosphere in which we are sitting may go far to explain it. But you are right that the automata can solve problems which are far beyond the capacity of the human mind, and some of the newest are so constructed that they can themselves design any machine which is needed to carry out their own conceptions. . . . There is a difference between the greatest man and the simplest machine which can never be bridged, and our highest wisdom is to observe it with reverence and humility. It is not a difference in degree, but in kind. We act from confused and contradictory impulses, but they with the inevitability of universal law. In a word, we are human and they divine."

She made the sacred sign as she said it, and observed with satisfaction that the hand of her hostess was lifted also. It was, at least, no house of open blasphemy into which she had entered. . . . But she resolved that a suggestion which she had intended to make should remain unspoken. It had been calculated that twenty human attendants would be required by their masters for certain menial offices in the next generation, for which provision had not yet been made, and she had been commissioned to obtain twenty women volunteers to produce them. She had thought of Bellorina at once as one who would be less likely than most of her acquaintances to resent the indignity of such a proposal. But she was a woman of religious mind, and she saw that Bellorina was morally unfit for such a motherhood. She turned the subject adroitly by remarking that the Bliskie trial would commence on Tuesday.

"I don't believe he did it on purpose," Scarletta started at once, "I think it's a shame to try him. I know I should make mistakes continually."

"It was bad enough for Corinna, anyway," said Mira, "you can't expect her not to complain. If you were put into the wrong operating-machine, and found you'd left half your

thyroid behind when you only wanted a cancer taken out of your liver——”

“Well, he says he forgot the numbers of the machines, for a moment. He’d never made a mistake before in over twenty years,” Scarlettta persisted.

“But you know they say that he’d quarrelled with Corinna the week before, and she said she knew he’d play her some trick before she entered,” Bellorina felt it only fair to remind her.

“It all shows the importance of eliminating the human element,” said Bora-Ann, who saw it to be a lesson which her companions needed. “A machine is not merely incapable of a spiteful action, it is so far above it that the very suspicion would be an absurdity; nor could it make such a mistake as the man suggests in his own defence—if such it can be called. To my mind it condemns him more utterly than if he admitted the accusation. But I believe that a proper automaton is already being designed to replace him, so that we need have no fear for ourselves in future.”

Bellorina sighed silently. She knew that it was wrong to doubt, and she was really sorry for the misadventure of Corinna’s thyroid. She realised the defects of her race. If only she had the intellect of Bora-Ann, no doubt it would be easier to believe. . . . After all, she had the prettiest hair in the Thames Valley, or so Gartie had told her. . . . And Gartie would be hers for a week from next Tuesday. . . . In the end, what matters? . . . She became aware that her thoughts had wandered, and her guests were rising. “Must you really go?” she was saying.

It may be that nothing does.

The last—the nameless last—of a dying race, the man sat before his drawing-board, idly fingering his compasses, forgetful of the uncompleted task which the overseer had set him, while his ageing mind went backward.

He might be the last of his kind . . . he knew that it was a sign of weakness to regret it. The fact that his mind was wandering now was a sign of his inferiority to the busy mechanisms around him. His mind was lawless and unstable in a Universe in which law and order were supreme and final.

There were some men who had seen this, even in the crude beginnings of the age of machinery. They had taught that everything is controlled at last by Natural Laws which are both blind and inflexible.

Men had foolishly imagined an ultimate supremacy of their own blundering bodies—even, in their incredible egotism, they had postulated an anthropomorphic God.

Yet, in a Universe where law and order rule, the precision of the machine—even of the earliest and crudest constructions—must have been superior, in greater harmony with their environment than were bodies so clumsily constructed that they cannot be trusted to repeat the simplest operations with exactitude of time or movement. Bodies easy to break, difficult to control or repair.

Dimly they had seen, even then, in a Universe which is itself a machine, working by mathematical, unchanging law, the absurdity of an emotional anthropomorphic God.

Yet they had not seen far ahead, at the first.

The steam-plough came, and the petrol-drawn car, and the horse died out to make place for these mechanisms. Few men had realised that the doom of their own race was logically foreshadowed, and that nothing could save them but a war sufficiently disastrous to destroy the world's machinery and the conditions which could reproduce it.

But such wars as came had only resulted in the subjection of the backward tribes who had not learnt the new worship. The industrial worker had disappeared before the pressure of economic law; the domestic servant before the dictates of

fashion. Even in the earliest days the new worship had been established, although it was not then recognised that a new and higher faith had superseded the old superstitions. When the new Moloch called for blood-sacrifice it had been paid without protest or regret, though it would not have been easily satisfied. It sucked blood very greedily, not of single sacrifices, as on the Hittite altars of old, but the blood of thousands. When it was thought that a system of one-way traffic might be conducive to its speed and comfort, the blood of an extra hundred of Londoners had not been grudged to the trial, though their deaths had been foreseen and fore-calculated.

Ships had already been manipulated without crews, and aeroplanes controlled without pilots, and where the helmsman had gone the chauffeur had very quickly followed.

Of course, there had been anger—protest—rebellion. There had been populations, particularly in some of the old urban areas, that had persisted in the production of useless unsanitary children. But such revolt had been futile. The machines had been invincible, and the men who fought beside them had shared their triumph. Even those early machines, directed and controlled by the men that made them, had been irresistible. They had not cried out when they were hurt, they had not slept when on duty. They belonged to a higher natural order than mankind.

. . . Soon it would be a world of machines from which the memory of mankind had died. He did not know that he was the last man living. How should he? But he knew that the last of human births was behind him.

A world of machines—to his feeble, futile brain it seemed lacking in purpose. Yet he knew, as his ancestors had perceived, that the Universe is without consciousness. Scientists had realised, even then, that sentient life is a sporadic outbreak, which, if it had ever occurred, or will do so, elsewhere, is almost incredibly remote and occasional, a mere outbreak

of cheese-mites, a speck of irritation, a moment's skin-disease on the healthy body of a Universe of never-changing law.

. . . He remembered the Crawlers. They had been no larger than a man. Their smooth skins had been impenetrable to anything less than a high-explosive shell. Their manibles were a 20 h.p. vice, yet so softly padded, so gradual in operation, that they could be trusted to strangle the throat they seized without breaking the skin, and to loose it when pulsation ceased, and they had fulfilled their purpose. A dozen of these let loose in the rebellious slums had soon checked their foolish fecundity. Then there had been . . . but his mind turned from the thought. They had been rather horrible in their operations—but effectual, as machines are.

The hypnotic method by which the Eastern races had been led to destroy themselves to the accompaniment of their own laughter had been a pleasanter thing to watch.

Deus ex machina—the human race had always had a subconscious knowledge of its deficiency. It was shown in their clumsy efforts at patterning: in their desire for repetitions of any kind: by the way in which they would snap and worry at anyone who deviated in word or garment: or in the stubborn continuation of a custom after need and meaning had left it.

But the time of rebellion had passed, and resignation had followed. Resignation—and worship.

Worship had been gradual in its growth, but inevitable. Even in the early days of the twentieth century men had stood in silent adoration around the machines that had self-produced a newspaper or a needle. . . . And at that time they could no more have conceived what was to follow than the first ape that drew the sheltering branches together could foresee the dim magnificence of a cathedral dome.

But even then they were displacing the anthropomorphic God, and preparing for the occupation of a vacant throne. . . .

He wakened guiltily from his wandering thoughts as the

bell rang that announced the coming of the messenger that would collect the work of the day. . . . Only five of the six drawings were ready. He did not know what would follow. Would they scrap him in consequence? He knew that he had been quite safe so long as he had been regular in his habits and exact in his work.

It was all law now—blind law. No emotion: no injustice: no caprice. Had the intricate evolutions of self-designing machinery provided for this unprecedented failure?

. . . He became aware that the collector was standing beside him. It would not wait. Starting hurriedly, he dropped the folded sheets into the slot that opened to take them. One—two—three—four—five——

The collector paused for a moment longer, giving time enough for the sixth sheet to follow. A wild and impious thought leapt in the brain of the delinquent. Might he not drop a blank sheet into the slot? When and how would the error be discovered? What confusion would result? Had he done so, it may be that the tiny cause would have spread disaster and chaos in that ordered world, and it might have fallen in fragments, to be rebuilt by the patient forces of evolution through succeeding æons. It is more probable that such a contingency had already been discounted by the inhuman powers which were at work around him. But had he been capable of such an action, he saw, even as he thought it, that it would be impossible. There was no time to fold the empty sheet before the automaton, after a second of human-seeming hesitation, had passed on, and was making its collection from the workers further along the bench.

He knew that he ought to move . . . he knew that the oiler would be here in a few minutes to caress and comfort the joints and bearings of his companions. . . . Yet he sat still, wondering. . . . The door opened, and an automaton entered. It was one of those which still bore a vague resemblance to

humanity, the pattern of the first designers not having been entirely abandoned. It was thus that the human race might leave the impress of its passing flicker of life for a million years—perhaps for ever—as a mollusc may leave its fossil imprint in the enduring rock.

It came quietly up to the nameless relic of the human race, and took his arm in a grip that was sufficient, but without violence.

He shuddered inwardly, remembering the fate of those who had rebelled in his early childhood, and who had been given in sacrifice by their fellow-men to the offended deities.

He remembered their screams as they had fallen among the machines that they had blasphemed so foolishly.

But he did not dream of rebellion. Evolution had triumphed. Side by side, they went out together.

The Rat

DR. MERSON looked at the dying rat, and decided that, should he delay his experiment longer, it would be dead before morning.

He had nursed it now for nearly six months, and it had been very old and blind when he had bought it.

He had told Briggs that he would give him £5 for the oldest rat in Belsham, and the rat-catcher had earned his money.

It had surprised him, when he had first approached the subject, to realise how difficult it would be to find an animal that was really old and feeble. He had to observe that Nature does not encourage the prolongation of pain and weariness: when youth goes, life very quickly follows.

But he knew that, in the course of their age-long warfare with the human race, the rats had arrived at some social organisation, and had adopted some of our practices, and in particular that when a disease of blindness (to which they are very liable) attacks them, they may be nursed and fed by members of their family, so that life is prolonged to an age which would otherwise be impossible.

So he had asked for an aged rat, and had watched its vitality recede, till now it was too weak to crawl towards the tempting food that was offered.

. . . It was so dull with age that it did not flinch when the needle pricked it.

The next morning it was not dead. It lay sleeping; old and blind and decrepit. It was not pleasant to look it, but it may have been less feeble than the night before—and the food had been eaten.

Dr. Merson, observing this, became aware that his heart was beating fast, with a sudden excitement of which he had not supposed himself to be capable.

When he looked at it again at midday, and observed that it was feebly attending to a neglected toilet, he did a thing which was less wise than his usual custom.

Mrs. Merson disliked his experiments, and his own habits of professional reticence disinclined him from speech which had no immediate purpose. But this was a discovery of such momentous consequence that he was impelled to share it.

"You mean that no one need ever die?" she asked incredulously. She was not greatly impressed, even if she took it with any seriousness. She was a healthy young woman, utterly without imagination, and the cook had given notice an hour ago.

"Yes, it might mean that—or nearly—unless by accident. You see," he continued, to an auditor who scarcely heard him, "it isn't really new. We've known for a long time that youth would continue if the cells of which the body is built have the right stimuli; but it's been difficult to find what they are. Some of the lower forms of life never die, as it is. The old ones break apart, and each section acquires a new impetus of growth from the shock of that division. But in the higher animals there is a change in the substance or activities of the cells as the years pass, the nature of which has been difficult to ascertain, though its results have been evident. . . ."

He stopped, as he became aware that Mrs. Merson had ceased to listen. She regarded the sleeping rat with disfavour.

"I shouldn't think anything wants to live when it's that old," she said, with decision. She had the impatience of healthy youth for all signs of decrepitude. They seemed stupid.

She heard the voice of the butcher at the back door, and her mind reverted to matters of greater urgency. She went back to the kitchen.

The rat improved very slowly. Its appetite increased. It moved more briskly. It gained weight. It gave more attention to its toilet. It became wilder, and more alert to the sounds around it. Finally, its sight returned.

The process was not rapid, but continuous. At the end of three months from when it had received the injection (which had not been repeated) it showed the bodily activity and physique of a young rat.

Dr. Merson did not mention it again to his wife, nor did he seek another confidant. He became thoughtful, and, at times, appeared to be suffering from acute depression. His patients complained, and his practice suffered.

The fact is that he was beginning to fear the consequences of his discovery.

At first, it had seemed simple—and stupendous. He was about to benefit his race, as no man had done before him. Had he not found a way by which death itself was defeated? He saw that it would change the whole face of the earth. Old age would become an obscene tradition. Disease would be powerless to overcome the new vitality which he had discovered. Men would no longer die as their minds approached the threshold of wisdom.

He thought of his own patients. There was Mrs. Corner who would be dead of tuberculosis within a year, unless he should use his new power for her rescue—Minnie Corner, with three young children, fighting her hopeless battle, always “a little better to-day”, when he called to watch the slow relentless progress of a disease that he could not conquer. He would be very glad to give her health. Having it in his power, it was a clear and simple duty, as her doctor, to do it. But (so far as he could suppose) he would do more than that. He would give her an approximation to immortality. Not absolute immortality. Her body would still be liable to be damaged or destroyed by violence. Certainly, it would have no power to survive the

planet on which it lived. It would be liable to drowning or suffocation. But it would no longer be in subjection to the treachery of time. Fed, and guarded from violence, it would not age nor decay. There was something odd in imagining Minnie Corner immortal. But there was nothing repellent. He supposed it would mean treating her children in the same way. They would be annoyed if they observed themselves growing old and feeble, while their mother remained young. It would confuse the relationship. Neither would she thank him for such a tableau. He knew Mrs. Corner well enough to realise that there would be no rest for him till he had conferred the same boon upon her household that he should give to her. Well, why not?

About two of the children there would be no difficulty. But he disliked Peter. He disliked Peter intensely. He could not endure the thought of an immortal Peter. It wasn't the club-foot, though it did seem a pity that it should become an abiding feature of a world grown static: it was certain qualities of meanness and cruelty which the boy had shown from infancy, which his mother had lamented, but which she had been powerless to influence.

According to the law of Nature which now prevailed, Peter would grow old, and in due course he would die, and his unpleasant characteristics would perish with him. He might have children, but these children would be different from himself, whether better or worse, and, in due course, they would have still different children, the race repeating itself with an unending variety.

Somehow, this seemed a better prospect than that of an enduring Peter.

Yet he could not imagine an arrangement being smoothly made by which Peter would be consigned to an exceptional mortality. However carefully his moral and physical inferiorities, and the importance of his early elimination, might be

explained to him, Dr. Merson felt sure that he would resent it furiously. He imagined a violent assault upon his own person by an adult and desperate Peter, to whom he was refusing the boon of immortality. Even a murderous assault. . . .

His mind was diverted to observe that murder would become a more serious crime than it now is—the risk of being murdered a more dreadful probability. Indeed, all physical risks would be taken at an almost infinitely greater price, and—presumably—with a corresponding reluctance. . . .

It was a relief to abandon these speculations to the task of lancing a boil on the neck of the landlord of the “Spotted Cow”.

The weeks went on, and the rat continued, and even increased, its youthful vigour. Its eyes were bright. Its coat was smooth and glossy. Its movements were lithe and swift. It was fierce, and watchful for a chance of biting. Once its teeth met in the sleeve of Dr. Merson’s coat, and the incident led him to wonder whether its new vitality could be communicated by the medium of a bite. He was aware that the thought gave him a sensation of peril escaped, and he realised that he was already regarding his discovery with apprehension rather than pleasure. Certainly, he had no wish to have its benefits thrust upon him before he had deliberated more fully on their ultimate consequences.

Also, the rat was disconcertingly watchful for a chance of escaping from its confinement. Once it actually got its head through the closing door, and it needed a sharp blow to induce it to abandon the hope of freedom. Dr. Merson had an actual nightmare as the result of imagining that it had escaped, and that his invention were destroyed or forgotten, so that the world would pass at last to the dominion of a continually-increasing army of immortal rats.

After that incident, Dr. Merson became careful to lock the

door of the laboratory, in which the rat was confined, and to keep the key in his pocket. Considering the possibilities which might follow, should it be accidentally let loose, he realised how little he yet knew of the nature of his discovery. He could not even say whether the vitality it conferred would be passed on to succeeding generations. He imagined some prolific and noxious insect, inoculated to immortality, and still exercising a blind fecundity. It might become uncontrollable, and destroy everything before it. That would be a weird ending to created life on this abortive planet, which must already be a joke to all surrounding intelligences.

Yet the idea was more than remotely possible. He imagined his discovery made public, and its advantages become the common property of mankind, and then some super-criminal threatening his race with the results of such an inoculation of some hostile vermin unless they should do his pleasure eternally.

Day by day his mind renewed its efforts to probe the consequences of his discovery, and retired bewildered, as it encountered some new problem, or some obvious result which he had not previously contemplated.

. . . He saw that the human race would become static. Not in brain, perhaps, but, at least, in body. That alone must make profound differences, produce profound cleavages. The ugly and deformed must remain so to all eternity. Perhaps, with an increased vitality: but vitality would not alter structure.

. . . There might be an agitation to eliminate the obviously unfit in brain or body, and to replace them with healthier children. But who would decide? Would those who were judged inferior be content to be sacrificed? He imagined fierce and ruthless wars of extermination. Suppose, again, that the white races should attempt to confine his discovery to their own use. He imagined the black and yellow races attacking them with a mad ferocity to force the priceless secret from

them. Would the white races yield, or would they risk their potentially immortal bodies in such a conflict? If they should yield, would not the latent animosities of race and race still remain, to break out into wars which, under such conditions, must result in servitude or extermination? . . . He saw that, in the absence of widespread war, the world would soon reach a maximum population, and that their children must cease . . . or, perhaps, an occasional child might be permitted to replace an accidental death . . . or a large number of children to replace the wastage of war. Would the race remain capable of these occasional fertilities? Or would it arrive at a position at which its numbers would be reduced (however slowly) by occasional misadventure, and these reductions would be irreplaceable?

. . . Or, if children remained a potential possibility, would not the desire for them become at times irresistible with at least many of the unoccupied women? Might they not welcome a war which would throw upon them the duty of replacement?

He was aroused from these visions by the consciousness that he was by Mrs. Empsey's bedside.

It was some years since Mrs. Empsey had walked across her bedroom floor. Her daughter, Ada, waited on her without complaint, and earned a little money by sewing and taking care of the neighbours' children. It was many years since Joe Horton had asked for any rent for the cottage. They had a few shillings weekly from the parish. So they lived.

Dr. Merson had not sent in a bill for ten years past. He never thought of doing so. He had fought as hard for Mrs. Empsey's life as for that of his wealthiest patient. It was all in the day's work.

But he had not been able to cure her. Indeed, he had not hoped to do so. Even now, he was not certain that her damaged interior could be reconstructed, though he could give

her a new vitality. But he hoped, even for that. Anyway, she would be about again, and Ada could marry the booking clerk at Belsham station, who had waited long enough. They were both over thirty. Here was one of the first places to which his discovery would bring a joy almost beyond imagination. Mrs. Empsey had always clung to life with a desperate cowardice. But even here he would do nothing—would say nothing—too hastily. The whole prospect was too stupendous.

He checked himself in writing a prescription which would have placed his patient beyond the power of any drug to revive her. . . . That was another thought. . . . The power of poisons would continue. . . . If the certainty of death were removed, would the dread of such contingencies be increased until life became an intolerable care to avoid them? Only experience could resolve that problem.

Out of much confusion of speculation, a thought came in the end, clearly born out of chaos. If he were right that his discovery could give perpetual youth to mankind, it could only mean that a limited number of people would live long, where, otherwise, a larger number of people would have lived for a shorter time. Putting aside all theories of future life, all the speculations or dogmatisms of religion, its only result could be to make the single life longer, and the individual lives less numerous. Finally, therefore, it could only be advantageous if it resulted in higher and happier conditions of life than those which were prevailing around him. It would abolish children. It would abolish age. It would make youth perpetual. Youth was the desire of all men. Those who were young desired to retain it. Those who were old would give anything they had to recover it. So much was clear—if he were only sure. Aiming to abolish age, might it not be found—and perhaps too late—that it was youth that had left the world?

By all outward evidences, the rat had regained its youth. Why should he doubt that it was the perpetuity of youth which he would offer to a grateful world? Perhaps he vexed himself because his own mind was too small to understand the greatness of his own discovery?

Yet, could youth be perpetual? Youth was not only of the body, it was of the spirit. He did not know. . . . As a doctor, he was pre-disposed to consider the physical as dominant. But the freshness of youth——?

He considered another possibility. Perhaps age would come, though more gradually, as the spirit tired. Then the body might be periodically inoculated to a new youth, as he had done to the rat, with all the joy of a returning spring-time. "If youth but knew——" How many men had wasted youth, and longed for its return in vain, when they had gained the experience which would have valued it more highly, and used it differently! To unite the experience of age with youth's vitality!—and then he saw his delusion . . . the joy of youth is not of experience but of inexperience. It is because the adventure is new: the path untrodden.

He considered himself. He did not feel old. He was forty-three. He knew that he must appear old to the young people around him. If he were unmarried, and should he ask a young girl to share his life, she might make it a jest to her companions.

But he had a good constitution and he had lived temperately. His body was still strong and vigorous. Yet he had not the outlook of youth. He realised that his youth would not return, though twenty years should be taken from the age of his body.

With a sudden clarity he realised that, to regain his youth, it was not so much a new body which would be needed; that which he had would serve his purpose well enough, could it only throw off the appearances of thinning hair and growing

corpulence, which disguised it from the youth around it; it was a new youth of the soul, and intervening Lethe, which would be needed.—He had made no discovery in that direction. Physically, youth might continue, but, as the centuries passed—and the millenniums——

He made efforts to regain the standpoint of his own youth, that he might explore its difference. He became absent-minded in reminiscence. . . . He used to write poetry then. He had not done anything quite so foolish for many years. All the same, he had done it rather well. The only weak point was that the poems were usually left unfinished. It was so much easier to get the first lines. The memories of youth moved him to the old impulse. With a sudden keen recovery of emotion he remembered his first meeting with Mollie. . . . The picnic under the trees. . . . The first shy kiss on her shoulder. . . . That was before he had gone to college. . . . He had always been loyal to her, and she to him. . . . He was not of the shallower sort of those that change lightly. . . . He loved her now, as he had loved her then—But oh! the world between . . .

It takes a life to learn

That none may steer his course to shear

The trail of light astern

That was well expressed. He would have written those lines down twenty years ago. He would have intended to make them into a complete poem. But he knew better now. He knew that they would never be finished. He knew so much about himself, and others. He even knew his own weaknesses.

That was the trouble. The inexperience of youth was something which could never be recovered, and the experience of age was no substitute. He realised that to abolish age is to abolish youth also.

Seeing this, his mind startled itself with a further possibility—might it be equally true to say that to abolish death would be to abolish life? In a moment's vision he saw life and death in a conflict from which each wins recurrent victory: he saw them interdependent, and this strife as the condition on which they both existed. . . . He imagined his discovery applied to the vegetable world. An oak tree in perpetual vigour—Would there be no place left for fruit-time and harvest? For the young growths of spring?—There was the question of food—Corn must still be grown for food, and mown down in due season—Or perhaps there might be developed roots of a continuing vigour? But the question of food was not merely a human one. All life grew by feeding upon the life around it.

This was fundamental. It had an aspect of cruel rapacity, seeming inconsistent with the idea of a beneficent God. Yet, if there be mortality at all, there can be no better end to the outworn or defeated body than to support the vigour of a new life. . . . His mind stopped, bewildered once again before the stupendous nature of the change which his discovery must bring to the earth's economy.

Perhaps the question was too great for one man to face. Would it not be well to announce his discovery, and for some small committee of selected men to consider whether it should be used? . . . But he knew that there would be no such question in the minds of men. They might doubt its advantages for other men, for alien races, for animal or vegetable creations, but for themselves there would be no doubt at all.

It was true that he might withhold the discovery itself, and merely announce that he possessed it, but even that announcement (if it were believed) might arouse an excitement that he could not estimate. . . . He imagined himself mobbed, beaten, even tortured, till he consented to reveal it to a frantic world. . . .

Pacing the laboratory restlessly, distracted with such thoughts

as these, afraid to meet the reproaches of his wife, who could not understand why he was changed and ageing so rapidly, so that he had acquired a habit of remaining there till it should be time to go out on his daily round, he regarded the rat, now running up the bars of its cage in a restless and tireless activity, with sudden hatred. He would kill the loathsome thing, and forget the horror he had discovered. Perhaps he might enjoy life once again. . . .

He looked at his watch, and was startled to see that it was half an hour after the usual time at which he set out on his daily round—and he had a consultation with Sir William Brett at 10.30 . . . he went out hurriedly.

School was just commencing that morning when Peter Corner left it. He owed his freedom to his ability to take unscrupulous advantage of the caprice of circumstance and the credulity of his fellows. His two sisters had colds, and his mother had kept them at home. Had he reported to his schoolmistress that his mother suspected measles he would have incurred the risk of ultimate retribution, which he was always adroit to avoid. Instead of that, he made the remark to Jessie Phipson, who could be relied upon to report it promptly. Challenged on the point, he strenuously denied the truth of the suggestion. His mother had never said so. He had told Jessie that they had not got measles *nor* scarlet fever. The mistress did not know what to believe, and sent him home till she could obtain more reliable information. He had expected that. His expression was almost good-tempered as he dragged his club-foot towards Dr. Merson's surgery. His sisters usually called for his mother's medicine, but as they had not come to school to-day the duty fell on him. He did not like going there. He hated Dr. Merson. He hated his eyes, which seemed to see through him without effort, and then to look elsewhere, as though he were not worth seeing. But he had got to go

to-day, and he had a hopeful idea this morning. He did not expect to get the medicine before noon. He knew that the doctor was not at home during the mornings. But he could not be blamed for calling on his way home.

He found the surgery door unlocked, as it was sometimes left when Dr. Merson was absent. He had expected that. He knew when and whether most of the doors in Belsham were locked or open. He did not often make use of this knowledge. His physical deformity, and the practical difficulties of secret-ing or disposing of illicit gains, had withheld him from active dishonesties. But in his waking dreams (for he had them, as much as more attractive children) he was most often a cat burglar of superhuman audacities.

Had he rung the surgery bell, the maid would have come, or the doctor's wife, but he turned the handle without haste or hesitation, and stood quietly inside, in an attitude of respectful waiting, till he was reassured by the surrounding silence. Then he passed through to the passage. He could not move very quietly, but a sound of crockery in the distant kitchen encouraged him, and—beyond his hopes—the key was in the door on the other side of the passage.

Dr. Merson did not often experiment with living animals, but it was generally known that he held a vivisection certificate. It was the dream of Peter's life to enter that room, and see the horrors which he vaguely imagined to be concealed behind the frosted glass that could be seen sideways from the road, if you forced your face sufficiently far between the palings.

Now the door was not even locked, though the key was in it. Peter opened it quietly, entered, and closed it behind him.

Dr. Merson had not gone far when he was vexed by a doubt as to whether he had locked the door. He was almost sure that he had—yes, he was quite sure—but he felt vaguely uneasy. He felt for the key in its usual pocket, but it was not there.

He felt in his other pockets, with the same result. He must have left it in the door. He felt sure now that he had turned the key, but had not removed it. That was what had made his mind uneasy. Really, it didn't matter. No one of his household would enter the room under such circumstances. Certainly Mollie wouldn't. She hated the room, and never entered it except to seek him. More certainly still, the maid would not venture. She would not enter to dust it. Not that he wanted her to. Women are a curse where a man works. But he knew her feeling. It was, in fact, her talk in the village which was mainly responsible for the fact that Peter Corner was now inside the room. But Dr. Merson didn't know that. He only thought that if the women of his household found the door locked and the key outside they would know that he couldn't be in, and would be unlikely to enter. But was he sure that he had locked it?

Probably he wouldn't have turned back, being so late already, had he not discovered, to his added annoyance, that he had left behind some clinical notes which he would require at the consultation for which he was late already.

He went back hastily. On the way, he made a resolution that he would kill the rat that night, and destroy the serum he had invented. He perceived with a sudden clarity that the world's Creator might understand His job better than a local practitioner in Belsham village. The relief that the decision gave him confirmed its wisdom. He was in better spirits than he had been for many weeks as he passed through the surgery and crossed the passage to the room beyond.

* * * * *

Sir William Brett waited for over half an hour at the house of the patient for the benefit of whose health, and relief of whose pocket, the consultation had been arranged. Then he rang up Dr. Merson's house for an explanation. He received

a reply (after some delay) that the doctor had been seized with a sudden indisposition, and greatly regretted that the appointment must be deferred until the following day.

The inquest on the body of Peter Corner had been adjourned by a coroner who had known Dr. Merson sufficiently well to regard it as incredible that he should have committed a crime so strange and so inexplicable. He hoped that the doctor might be found, or that his voluntary return would furnish some satisfactory explanation. But the police had not been retarded by any similar hesitation. Within twenty-four hours of the doctor's disappearance the dismembered body of Peter Corner had been discovered, and the facts that he could not be found, and that he had drawn nearly four hundred pounds (practically the whole of his available balance) from his bank in Treasury notes on the previous day, had enabled them to obtain a warrant for his arrest without difficulty. . . . But the warrant had not been executed.

Dr. Merson had walked to the station quite openly. He had chatted with casual acquaintances on the platform. He had even got into a compartment containing others who knew him. He had travelled to London, saying that he was in search of certain surgical instruments which he required to renew, and had disappeared absolutely.

It was agreed that he had been in particularly good spirits. Indeed—and this was one of the minor mysteries of the case—there had been a noticeable change in his demeanour from the morning when Peter had been seen to enter the door of his surgery. Everyone noticed the change. It was as though a load of fear or trouble had been suddenly lifted from him.

Mrs. Merson—who had insisted on giving evidence in spite of the coroner's warning—had confirmed this. She had entered the witness-box to urge her conviction, against the weight of overwhelming evidence, that he had not murdered Peter at

all, and to assert that he had himself been living in dread of some mysterious enemy who must be responsible both for the fate of Peter and for her husband's disappearance.

Her evidence, given with the convincing simplicity of an unimaginative mind, had impressed its hearers with her sincerity, and increased the sympathy with which she was regarded, but it could not shake the weight of evidence which placed the crime upon the shoulders of the absent doctor.

It was recognised by the police that the doctor could not have known that Peter would be released from school that morning, but their theory was that he had met the boy by chance in the street, and had recognised an unexpected opportunity for the commission of a crime which had been designed within his mind previously. He had told the boy to go to the surgery and await his return. He had followed immediately by a different route, entered the surgery unobserved, and promptly disposed of his unsuspecting victim. His household admitted that they had not known that he was at home till the telephone inquiry from Sir William Brett had caused them to seek him, and he had then replied, through a half-opened door, that he was unwell, and the appointment must be deferred to the following day.

He had callously proceeded to the dissection of his victim's body, and it was only when the police had traced the missing boy to his own door, and the inquiries had become too close and pointed for his comfort, that he had decided to bolt, without delaying for the added risk of attempting the destruction or removal of the dismembered corpse.

Such was the theory of the police, and while it failed to offer the explanation of any adequate motive for a deed so ghastly, and a risk so great, and while there was nothing in the doctor's previous record to support the suggestion of criminality at once so gross and so reckless, yet it had the advantage of meeting the admitted facts more plausibly than appeared otherwise

possible, and even those who were least willing to believe that the doctor could have been guilty of such a murder were unable to put forward any reasonable supposition which could explain the presence of the boy's remains on his premises, and his subsequent flight and silence.

It was now two months since Dr. Merson had alighted at Paddington, and been seen to make a leisurely descent of the stairs to the Underground station which adjoins that terminus. Doubtless the police would continue their inquiries, and the public would continue to keep them occupied with abortive "clues", but the coroner could see no reason for adjourning the inquest further, nor means of avoiding the obvious verdict which the jury would be expected to render. It would place him under the painful necessity of issuing a warrant against an old friend, of whose guilt his own mind was not easily convinced, but it would be of no practical importance, in view of the magistrate's warrant on which the police were already acting. (The time had not arrived at which this duplication of procedure was reformed in practice.)

He had no further evidence to bring forward, except that of Sir Lionel Tipshift, the Home Office expert, who had conducted the post-mortem on the dismembered body, and who would give his opinion upon the cause of death with the air of Olympic impartiality on which the police had relied so often for the hanging of suspected persons.

The Coroner's Court was small and crowded. It was a rainy day, and the atmosphere within the court was one of depression, and of damp umbrellas. The room was plainly furnished, with a table for the legal profession, an arm-chair for the coroner, a partitioned corner for the jury, and some benches for the use of the waiting witnesses and the general public. It was clean, and its windows were wide and high. Yet it had an aspect of invincible grime, as though it were washed incessantly

and vainly to remove an ingrained dirt, against which no physical assault could be directed successfully.

Mrs. Merson sat on the front bench, looking grave, but not acutely miserable. Her husband's cousin, Mr. Reginald Merson, sat beside her. This gentleman (of whose existence she had not known previously) had arrived from the Argentine about six weeks after Dr. Merson had disappeared. He had made a casual call upon a cousin whom he had not seen for over twenty years, and finding himself in the midst of circumstances so strange and tragic, and having time at his disposal, he had offered such help as he could give to his cousin's wife by remaining until the inquest should be over. He had declined her invitation to reside in the house, preferring to take a room at the "Spotted Cow", but this discretion had not prevented some unkindly gossip, which had attributed Mrs. Merson's equanimity to the very opportune companionship which he was able to offer.

On this point, gossip was not entirely wrong; but the emotions of the doctor's wife, being beyond her own analysis, were not likely to be understood by the observation of strangers. She had not wavered in her loyalty to her absent husband, nor had her affection lessened. She held a matter-of-course opinion that he had not murdered anyone; she was quite sure that he was not dead; and she was equally sure that he would return at his own time, and deal with the situation with his usual efficiency. She had decided that the whole trouble was the work of some enmity, as to the nature of which, as was natural in the case of one who was destitute of normal imagination, her imaginations were very wild indeed. Mr. Reginald Merson attracted and sometimes bewildered her by a likeness, not so much to her husband as she had last seen him, as to that which he had been at the time of their engagement and during the first years of her married life. His voice, though stronger in tone, was curiously similar; his hair, though abundant,

whereas her husband had become partially bald, was of the same colour and quality—or, perhaps, very slightly darker. His features were alike, except for the short hair on the upper lip, and even that was a reminder of how her husband once had worn it. He was slow and guarded in speech, but, even so, he would let fall remarks at times which showed a puzzling familiarity with the past events of the household.

She did not disguise from herself that his presence gave her confidence, though there was mystery even in that, for he never spoke with any conviction of the doctor's innocence, nor suggested that he might return and vindicate his reputation, and any plans he might casually indicate for her future appeared to assume that the doctor's disappearance was to be accepted as final.

Inspector Clawson, who was in charge of the case, had not overlooked the strangeness of the arrival of this young man, and his curiosity had been increased when he had failed to trace the name of Merson on the passenger lists of any recently-arriving liners. He did not see how Mr. Reginald Merson could be associated with the crime, in the absence of any evidence that he had been in the neighbourhood when it was committed, but he felt that he was a source from which valuable information might be obtained, who might very probably be aware of the place in which the doctor was hiding, and might very possibly be induced to speak if the penalties which are incurred by an accessory after the fact were judiciously indicated.

He had him watched, and discovered nothing. He appeared to have no acquaintances, except Mrs. Merson. He wrote no letters. He received none. The Inspector decided to interview him.

Mr. Reginald received him genially. He alluded to the murder at once, and condoled with him on his failure to make any arrest. The position seemed to amuse him. The

Inspector could not see the joke, and did not like the tone he adopted. He asserted, with a confidence that he did not feel, that he expected that an arrest would soon be made. "Scotland Yard," he asserted, lying with the boldness of exasperation, "always gets its man in the end."

Mr. Reginald suggested humorously that he might himself be the doctor in disguise. Would the Inspector like to arrest him? The Inspector would have liked to do so very well, had a sufficient pretext arisen. He had already considered the possibility which was now suggested in an obvious mockery. The appearance of this mysterious cousin, at such a time, and of so vague an origin, would have attracted the notice of the dullest detective of fiction, and Inspector Clawson was a very capable officer.

But his judgment was too sound to lead him into an error so obvious. He knew how much may be done by disguise, and he knew its limitations. He had never seen Dr. Merson, but he had examined some recent photographs. He knew his age. He had discussed his appearance with local members of the force, who had seen him daily.

Between the sudden-disappearing doctor and the suddenly-arriving cousin there were more than the usual cousinly resemblances. But the differences were beyond the possibilities of disguise or explanation. A bald man cannot disguise himself with a thick crop of natural hair. A man of a growing rotundity cannot disguise himself in a few weeks by the production of a slim and obviously youthful figure. A man of forty-five cannot disguise himself into an appearance of half his age which will deceive the hostile eyes of a detective who is standing two feet away in the open street, when the morning is sunny.

Inspector Clawson only remarked that it was a fine day.

That was yesterday. In the Coroner's Court this morning the Inspector's eyes were still drawn in the same direction. He

was not greatly interested in the evidence of Sir Lionel Tipshift. For one reason, he knew what it was to be, and for another, he had no respect for the expert witness. He is useful to impress juries, but the police and lawyers knew that another can always be procured to contradict him. Sir Lionel Tipshift was a tame expert, regularly hired by the Crown. The nature of his evidence could be relied upon as certainly as that a prosecuting counsel would not point out the probable innocence of the prisoner against whom his brief was drawn.

So the Inspector's attention wandered while Sir Lionel, with a manner suggesting that he was slightly bored by his own infallibility, gave the result of his post-mortem examination. The body, he assured the court, had been disjointed after death—probably several hours later—by someone with considerable knowledge of anatomy. The internal organs had been preserved, and (with some technical qualifications) were healthy. There was no trace of poison. There were marks of violence upon the body, including certain bruises on the legs, which must have been caused before death by some blunt instrument. (That was correct. They had been inflicted by Bunny Simpson's boot in the school playground on the afternoon before Peter's existence had abruptly terminated.)

The listeners were hypnotised by the coldly decisive voice to the belief that additional and important evidence had been given. The coroner only, being accustomed to analyse evidence, was conscious that nothing had been added to that which was already known, or could have been reasonably deduced from admitted circumstances, and he was about to address a final word to the jury, when Mr. Reginald Merson rose, and asked, in a deferential but self-possessed manner, if, as the nearest male relative of the absent doctor, whose reputation was so much concerned, the unfortunate death having taken place on his premises, he might ask Sir Lionel Tipshift a few questions upon the evidence he had given.

The coroner hesitated. A coroner's inquiry is somewhat less formal than are the proceedings in the criminal courts. Possibly the fact that all coroners do not belong to the legal profession (many are doctors) may have produced a less rigid etiquette for preventing oral intercourse of any kind except through the medium of a paid lawyer. But it is not usual for a witness to be examined in such a manner. He was about to say that he would himself put any inquiry which he might approve, if Mr. Merson would let him know what was in his mind, when that gentleman, taking his pause of hesitation for consent, addressed a question to Sir Lionel which was sufficiently unexpected to cause him to remain silent to await the answer.

"Can you tell me if any other body was discovered in the laboratory, besides that of Peter Corner?"

Sir Lionel, who had already moved some paces from the witness-stand, turned back as he answered with a dry precision:

"There were no other human remains. Dr. Merson appears to have been engaged in the dissection of a recently-killed rat, on the last occasion on which he occupied the laboratory."

"Does not the fact that he could have been so occupied, at such a time, with the boy's body upon his hands, suggest that there must have been some connection between the two?" Mr. Reginald asked, but the coroner interposed before Sir Lionel could answer:

"If you have any information which may be of assistance to this inquiry, Mr. Merson, I must ask you to take the oath, and offer your evidence in the usual way; it cannot be given in the form of suggestions to another witness."

Mr. Merson did not appear either disconcerted or annoyed by this rebuke. He answered easily. He apologised for his ignorance of the correct procedure. He regretted that he was not in a position to accept the coroner's offer. It had only occurred to him—and he submitted the suggestion with

diffidence—that the doctor might have suddenly returned, having remembered, after starting out, that he had not locked the room in accordance with his usual practice, and found the boy trespassing within it. Suppose that the rat had been inoculated with some new and dreadful disease, and the boy had interfered with it, and had been bitten, so that he would be certain to contract it, and would not only die himself but might give it to others, would it not become a natural thing—even a duty—however unlawful—to take any steps, at whatever personal risk, to prevent such consequences?

The court listened in a tense silence to this unexpected theory, but Sir Lionel, though he had not been addressed, gave a reply which disposed of its probability, the coroner silently allowing his interposition, with the respect which was usually accorded to his name and title.

“The rat was not diseased. It was a remarkably fine specimen. Indeed, it was the finest and healthiest that I have ever seen. There were remarkable signs of vitality in every organ.”

“Then, if it were so exceptional in its physical development, might it not have sprung at the boy’s throat, when he opened the door of its cage—which would be about at the same level—and inflicted a serious or even a fatal wound?”

Sir Lionel, who was seldom disinclined to the sound of his own voice, was about to answer, but his opinion on this point will never be known, for this time the coroner interposed too quickly.

“I don’t think, Mr. Merson, that anything can be gained by pursuing hypothetical improbabilities. Such explanations, if put forward at all, should have come from Dr. Merson himself, or from some regularly-appointed advocate on his behalf. I am not aware that you have any claim to represent him at all, beyond that of an alleged relationship, and even that has not been sworn to. Dr. Merson is absent. He went away voluntarily, leaving the body of this unhappy boy on his

premises, at a time when he knew that inquiries were turning in his direction. I am afraid that the jury will draw their own conclusions." He paused a moment, and then commenced a brief and lucid charge to the jury, from which a verdict of wilful murder against the absent doctor might be confidently expected.

Mr. Reginald Merson turned to the woman beside him, and said something in a low voice, on which she smiled, and rose with him. Evidently they did not propose to wait to hear the verdict given. The ease and confidence of his own demeanour appeared to have infected his companion, and she passed out somewhat briskly and buoyantly as one who leaves an unpleasant incident with finality.

As they went down the steps which led to the street, Inspector Clawson touched Mr. Merson's arm, and he turned politely.

"I should just like to ask," said the Inspector, "how you came to know that the boy opened the cage."

Mr. Merson appeared amused. "I dreamt it on Monday night, Inspector. . . . I'm rather good at dreams," he added pleasantly.

The Inspector's hand was in his pocket. His fingers closed upon the warrant which he was carrying. If only he had the courage to make the arrest to which his instinct urged him! It might make—or break—him. He became aware that Mr. Merson was speaking to him again, and in a voice of banter. "It's no good, Inspector. You won't get a word more. The voluntary statement's played out. . . . It's no use worrying," he said kindly, "you'd better go home and forget it."

The Inspector felt that the advice was sound, though he did not like it. He thought of his wife and children and of the comfortable pension which waits the later years of frequently-promoted officers, who do not make mistakes which arouse adverse newspaper comment. He turned sadly away.

Dr. Merson walked home very happily, beside a wife who did not know him. He was very fond of Mollie. He wondered (as he had done before) if the time had come to show her the birth-mark on his left arm. He wondered whether it would be expedient to use the hypodermic syringe which was in his right-hand pocket, which would restore her youth and give her the vitality which he was already experiencing. He liked her very well as she was, but he did not doubt that he should like her quite as well if she were looking twenty years younger. But he was not quite clear as to the pretext on which he should make the injection. Not quite clear, either, that it would be morally defensible to do it without explaining its results beforehand. He felt that to convince her of the actual truth would not be the easiest of mental enterprises. But he felt also that, if she should be led to share his experiences, she would admit his identity more readily than would be otherwise probable.

Still, there was no hurry. There might even be advantages in delay. He imagined Inspector Clawson studying the metamorphosis of the wife of the missing doctor. It would be amusing. It could hardly be dangerous. Still, it was a needless risk. There was no hurry.

Yes—he would come in to tea.

Rule

It is an old saying that the man who makes a nation's ballads has more power than any legislator over the minds and deeds of his fellows.

Its truth is so apparent that it is frequently quoted as a fact that need only be stated to be approved.

Yet it was not to be observed that any modern statesman had attempted to utilize the power which his knowledge held, until Levi T. Salaman, the Home Secretary in the Conservative Government which succeeded the defeat of Mr. Braithwaite's unfortunate coalition, put the proposition seriously before a startled cabinet, which was engaged in discussing a draft of the King's Speech with which they were to meet the new parliament.

"It means," he said, "that we can remain in office just as long as we may desire to do so."

Mr. Bridger, who was first tasting the sweets of office as Postmaster-General, remarked that no sacrifice was too great when the welfare of the nation required it.

The Premier, who considered that the speech he had drafted was not easily to be improved, and that it was sufficiently long already, observed coldly that he was no good at song, and didn't propose to try.

Mr. Salaman retorted that he had not intended to suggest that the Premier should charm the country, or even the House, by singing ballads of his own composition.

"But suppose," he said, "that every band in England were to parade the streets next Tuesday playing martial music of the most inspiring selections. Suppose that it were echoed that night in every theatre and concert-hall in the land. Suppose

that this atmosphere were supported by stage and film, and broadcasted without cessation, and that the programme were continued till the end of the week, to be followed by sermons in every Sunday pulpit of the most bellicose kind, would not a condition of national feeling have been aroused such as would support a declaration of war upon anything from the moon to Mammon?"

Lord Blackenstill considered thoughtfully that a feller couldn't tell what would happen—they couldn't *all* go abroad.

Sir Chilton Chillworth looked at the Premier and remarked that he had an appointment at 5.30.

Mr. Huntley-Johnson, who held that exalted office, replied that *his* appointment was at 5.15.

Mr. Bridger asked if Mr. Salaman were really serious.

The Hon. Tarker Bentham, who had not spoken previously, remarked that any proposal that Mr. Salaman put forward seriously must deserve attention.

This observation somewhat sobered the meeting, bringing it to their minds that Mr. Salaman had no reputation for idle jocularities, and that there had been a somewhat similar scene at the party headquarters before the election, when Mr. Salaman had urged upon them that they could gain an overwhelming majority by promising economy in taxation *as though they meant it*.

He had been ridiculed then; had been told that the Conservative Party had always stood for economy—sound economy was their watch-word—they fought the communist, socialist, etc., etc., parties of waste and extravagance. What more would he have?

When they had understood, they had gasped and protested. But they had wanted to win. They had little hope, as feeling then was. In the end, they had agreed. They had promised that the income tax should be halved or quartered. That penny postage should be restored. That taxes on tea and sugar should

be abolished. They had said it as though they meant it. They had practised the necessary facial expression in the secrecy of their own rooms, and to the admiration of their private secretaries.

"Nothing," Mr. Huntley-Johnson had declaimed, in a speech which had been twice broadcast, so that none need miss it, "*nothing* shall be allowed to thwart us in this sacred enterprise. No longer shall the crushing burden of unjust taxation take the stale crusts from the starving mouths of our mothers: no longer shall the cradles be left empty in the lumber-rooms of the nation's homes.

"To the civil servants who clamour to increase a taxation which is already ten times the amount at which our fathers winced and grumbled, I say that the nation shall be bled white no longer. Where you have had ten-fold, you shall be content with four."

After this, they had established the Four-fold League, to which millions of voters had allied themselves. The shilling entrance fees had paid the entire expenses of many of the Conservative candidates, every one of whom had taken the solemn oath of the League.

And the country had believed; yes, it had believed the incredible. And they had been elected by such majorities that almost all their opponents, of whatever party, had forfeited their deposits, the total sum accruing to the nation in this way amounting to nearly £1,000,000, and forming a first evidence of how easily money could be obtained if their policy did not err through a too-scrupulous cowardice.

And now, in their hour of triumph, when there were only seventeen of the House of Commons (besides the Speaker) who were not members of the victorious party, they could scarcely refuse a hearing to the one whose advice had led them to so amazing a victory.

Mr. Huntley-Johnson put back his watch.

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"I know it sounds silly at first," Mr. Salaman began, when he felt that he had gained the attention of his colleagues, "but I think you know I shouldn't bring it before you if I had not thought it out carefully.

"I don't know that we shall need to *make* any songs at all. There are lots of songs in the world already, and there are probably as many silly ones as we are ever likely to need.

"What we've got to do is to control the films, and the gramophone records. We've got such a start with the B.B.C., and we can do it so easily on the same lines, partly by legislation and partly by finance, that there's really very little to discuss except the effects which would follow such a practice, and if you think about it for a few minutes you may agree that there needn't be much doubt about that.

"Of course, we shouldn't use it to start a war, or anything wicked or socialistic. But it would be useful in lots of ways. Say to support a law that all votes given at this election should count at the next one. There's nothing undemocratic in that suggestion. It would be just emphasised democracy. Sacred voice of the people, and all that. Even six years after, you mustn't treat it too lightly.—Or you might make it that everyone's vote should count again if he had died in the meantime. That's good conservatism. Filial feeling. Reverence age. Voice of the dead. Mother's last word. Like a will. These votes could be tabulated first, and form the basis at which the candidates would start. Make some of them sick, wouldn't it? It's just the time to start it with the votes we've polled."

(Yes. They all saw that.)

"But we needn't do anything like that at first. Why not try it out on something simple? You can get the people to believe anything, if you say it as though you mean it. We've proved that, haven't we?

". . . I learnt that in the days when I wasn't Chairman of the *Two Hemispheres*. You know, I started as a weekly

canvasser, and in three months I brought in so much new business that they made me Superintendent of Agents, and I used to go from district to district, showing them how to do it.

"It isn't easy, when you come to think of it. You call on the man who wants a policy, and he says: 'Your premiums are ten per cent higher than the Globe & Universe's.' And you say: 'Yes, but our company started with a capital of £250, and now it's got a reserve of £36,000,000—and the G. & U.'s reserves are only £23,500,000.' And the man doesn't ask how many mugs' pockets must have been emptied into them, he just pulls out his cheque-book and makes another.

"It just shows it doesn't much matter what you say. It's how you say it that counts. . . . Why shouldn't we start by taking over the Insurance Companies?"

Mr. Salaman's fellow cabinet ministers always felt a little breathless when he had been really roused to address them in earnest.

You couldn't say he was exactly a socialist. They knew that a portrait of Mussolini met his waking eyes every morning on his bedroom's sunniest wall. But, somehow, he would go the pace. Not the slow pace suitable to the dignity of the party to which he gave the benefit of his support. Not at all.

Now they blinked at each other uncertainly, and Mr. Huntley-Johnson coughed, and began: "I hope you don't propose a policy of confiscation . . . our most sacred principles . . ."

"Confiscation? Of course not. I'd rather die. But you know that there are a good many hundreds of millions of money fructifying in the pockets of the Insurance Companies. (Yes, I know that's Gladstone. Good word 'fructify', all the same.) Well, we've got to get some money *somewhere*. You know what we promised. Of course, we needn't remember now, but if you *can* keep a promise I always think it is just as well. You can't deny that if we had those millions we should know what to do with them.

"But I wouldn't confiscate a sixpence. You just leave it to me, and in ten days' time I'll have them just *begging* to be taken over.

"Now look here, Johnson, I'll tell you what. I won't ask you to put anything in the King's Speech. It sounds rattling well as it is, and perhaps it wouldn't be wise. But just let me run loose on this. Give me a week from the 15th, and I'll get Noel Wallace to write two or three plays—it's Wednesday now, so he could have them ready for Saturday morning—that will cost us ten thousand; and Lord Merseypier can do the press, that will make twenty; and we'll get the Dean to help, say two-fifty; and the broadcasting won't cost us anything; and we shall want a good catchy song for the halls—only one—we want everybody humming the same thing, it's the chorus that matters; and there may be a few other things I shall think of later; the sermons will preach themselves at the week-end when this has gone on from Monday mid-day. . . ."

Mr. Huntley-Johnson cut across the stream of eloquence with a remark that he really *must* go now, but they'd all got confidence in Mr. Salaman. If he felt sure—"You know, Levi, I shall have to drop you, if it goes wrong. It's your racket, and your risk."

"I'm not worrying about that," Mr. Salaman replied cheerfully. He was well content with the ease of his victory. He went out talking earnestly to the new Postmaster-General.

The campaign commenced on Monday, the 15th, as was first planned in Mr. Salaman's lively brain. The plays had been ready, as he expected, on the Saturday morning, a clear week beforehand. Mr. Noel Wallace had himself superintended the rehearsals at the three theatres. He had also written the required song for the halls, the refrain of which,

on the morning of the 16th, was being hummed and whistled in hundreds of London streets. It was a very catchy chorus, implying that the misery of the slums had increased:

“. . . ever since
They came and took the pince,
The Monday morning pince of the poor.”

. . . In the West End, Mr. Wallace's play "Contrasts" staged a more golden scene than had ever entered the imagination of Mr. Arnold Bennett, exhibiting an Insurance Magnate at dinner, nightingales' tongues being ladled on to his plate with a golden tablespoon, flunkys seven deep behind his Parian-marble throne, and a surrounding magnificence before which description falters; while outside, in the frozen street, a widowed orphan, or perhaps it was an orphaned widow, who had already pawned her wedding-ring and her husband's miniature in a vain effort to pay the premium arrears, committed suicide by swallowing the cancelled policy. At the scene in the Coroner's Court, when the fatal policy was produced, as it had been recovered at the post-mortem, there were few who could control their tears. . . .

The *World* approached the subject with its customary dignity. Its editorials took little part in the controversy. But its news columns gave increasing space to reports of the agitation as the week proceeded, and it also printed a series of daily articles, *Insurance Buildings of To-Day*, which did not disguise their author's indignation at the towering solidity of these structures, especially those of the great industrial companies. Dealing with one of these massive edifices in the London area, he had made an appalling calculation of the number of coppers of the poor which were required to hew and shape and carry and build-in a single one of the huge blocks of red granite of which it consisted—every coin, as he

represented, being some reduction in the needed food or warmth or light or clothing of the poor—every coin paid over in foolish faith that it would be returned to them at their hour of need—and then used to build this monument of cynical arrogance, which seemed to mock them with the impossibility of returning pence which had so securely rooted in the Holborn soil.

“The weight of these stones,” he wrote, “—what is it but the weight of their oppression of the helpless poor? Their colour—what does it symbolise but that they have sucked successfully the richest life-blood of the land?”

Even *Scrappy Bits* and the *Weekly Joker* had a score of allusions to excessive premiums and the agents’ wiles.

The *Financial Standard* had an alarmist article showing that every year the total investments of the great Insurance Companies increased at a more rapid pace than the nation’s savings. “What,” it asked, “is the inevitable end to which such a state of affairs must lead at last? It is not a matter for argument, but for simple arithmetic only. In *seventy-three years, at the present rate of accumulation, the Insurance Companies will own the entire wealth of the land.*”

An individual who was widely known as Uncle Jackie by followers of the B.B.C. (which has always considered that the British Public is enamoured of this relationship) gave a series of nightly talks to show that all premiums ought to be reduced by from 38.6 to 49.55%, with fascinating speculations as to what his audience would most probably do with the rescued wealth—wealth which would not consist of a solitary week-end harvest, but would be continued as each Monday morning came, like a perpetual endowment fund.

The very catchwords which had been used to induce the individual to pass over his own money to be retained and accumulated by these organisations were now used against them. The *Daily Pail*, in a well-worded leader entitled *A*

Penny Saved is a Penny Gained, produced an imagination of a whole nation engaged in a public effort to preserve its pennies from this ubiquitous rapacity. In the *Westminster Post* the famous caricaturist "Pow" had a picture of a huge mound of many millions of pennies occupying a double page of the periodical, while in a corner, so small as to observe with difficulty, an insurance agent was taking coins from a hole in the bottom of the pocket of a working man as he dropped them in at the top, so that it remained empty continually—the ragged, abject, and yet dignified misery of the victim constituting the greatest triumph of the artist's career.

But it would be wearisome to recount a tithe of the methods by which the idea was reiterated from sky and ground, from stage and hoarding, by voice and pen, during that week—or, at least, during the earlier part of that week; for there was one point on which Mr. Salaman had to admit that he had miscalculated.

A week would have been as needless as it would have been tragic. On Friday morning the campaign was over, and the Home Office was energetically stamping out the last cinders of the conflagration that it had raised.

It had been on Wednesday, at midday, that the body of the first victim, an insurance agent named Fortune, had been recovered from the canal at Shiffnal. One hundred and seventeen such bodies were scattered over the land when Thursday morning dawned. At Plymouth, where a local journalist had attempted to assist the movement with an article entitled *The Frugal Foreigner*, showing how the exotic inhabitants of the East End of London decline to share our folly, and when they recognise the excessive burden of fire insurance premiums, promptly and equitably adjust the burden in their own way, the householders of that ancient port caught the idea with such avidity that the same Thursday morning saw about two-thirds of them camping in tents in the surrounding fields, while they

sat on the summer grass calculating the compensation which they could claim for their smouldering homes, the smoke of which a friendly north-west wind was blowing out to sea. At Birkenhead the premises of the *Gas-pipe and Globe Insurance Company, Limited*, a particularly innocent corporation which had ceased the payment of dividends since the spread of electricity had reduced its profits, were wrecked completely, and the office-boy, who had only been engaged a week earlier, was taken to hospital with a broken leg.

Hurried conferences during Thursday afternoon resulted in a deputation representing over twenty of the largest companies being received by the Premier, and, after some hours of fevered negotiation, an agreement was signed at 1.30 a.m. on Friday morning, by which the assets and liabilities of all Insurance Companies of every kind were to be transferred to national ownership as from 9 a.m. of that day. Ten per cent of the amount realised by the sale of buildings which would become redundant under one administration was to be devoted to pensioning the directors and actuaries of the companies. Of the staffs two per cent were to be retained, and the remaining ninety-eight per cent were to have the option of being taken over by the Federation of British Industries, which would distribute them over the world to push the overseas trade of the Empire.

On Friday evening the Premier was able to announce to a delirious House that the Insurance Companies had been taken over by the nation at their own urgent request, and that while it was too early to state the final results of this arrangement, a preliminary instruction had been issued that all premiums should be reduced by one-third, and he could say at once that there would be no occasion to make any further collection of income-tax during the present year.

It was a fortnight later that Mr. Montague Rogers, the Chair-

man of the *London and Northern Bank, Ltd.*, called upon Mr. Salaman, and was promptly shown into his private room.

"Mr. Salaman," he said, coming to the point with his usual directness, "there's a report about the City that you're going to stampede the banks, as you did the insurance business three weeks ago."

"It's quite baseless," Mr. Salaman assured him cheerfully. "But I shouldn't say we stampeded the insurance *business*. That's doing better than ever. It's the *companies* that are getting hard to find."

"Well, I don't know," Mr. Rogers replied with a friendly scepticism, and ignoring the latter part of the Home Secretary's answer. "Anyway, we've been talking it over, and I've been asked to see you about it."

"Who's we?" Mr. Salaman smiled upon him.

"All the Big Five, as they call us in the city, and most of the smaller banks also. I think, Salaman," he continued easily, "I can speak for the banking interests of the country; except, of course, the Bank of England."

"Well, I'm willing to listen."

"I'm not here to threaten," Mr. Rogers replied, with the smile which a banker reserves for his richest customers, "I'm here to talk business reasonably. You've made a good thing of the Insurance Companies, and you might naturally think of another coup of the same kind. But it wouldn't really be the same kind at all. The banks could hit back. They could hit back in a hundred ways, some of which even you, Mr. Salaman," he smiled with additional geniality, as recognising the exceptional penetration of the Home Secretary's mind, "may not have thought of. You see, we're used to looking ahead. As a matter of fact, we'd formed our plans within forty-eight hours of the insurance——" (he checked himself, having almost said 'ramp', and continued), "*campaign* being started. Of course, we saw what you meant to do."

He paused to observe the effect of his words, and Mr. Salaman took up the challenge immediately.

"I always like to do business with men who've got brains; it's done so much more easily. What's the proposal?"

"There's nothing really to discuss, if you assure me that there's no foundation for the rumour that's going about, and that you don't intend to attack us."

"I said the rumour was baseless. I didn't go beyond that."

"I see. Well, if you can't go further, it's fair to say that if you should make such an attack on the banking interest of the country, you will face such a financial position in twenty-four hours that no government could survive it."

"Well, it's a sporting risk," Mr. Salaman answered lightly. "I've half a mind to try."

Mr. Rogers did not look happy. He changed the tone of the conversation with some adroitness.

"I don't think," he said gravely, "that the prosperity of this great country can be regarded lightly. When we meet together I can assure you, Mr. Salaman, that we regard it as a sacred trust. A sacred responsibility, transcending any personal considerations whatever. I feel sure that you wouldn't do anything to risk it without the most anxious thought, and without the opportunity of further conference with us."

"I am open to deal," Mr. Salaman assured him briskly.

Mr. Rogers's hesitation was barely susceptible. Then he decided that he had gone too far not to go further.

"What do you propose?" he said quietly.

"It's 3.30 now," Mr. Salaman answered. "You couldn't make much mess before you open tomorrow. I propose to get a bill through both Houses to-night so that you'll find the government will control you all in the morning. But I'm willing to deal. If you'll take over the National Debt, and undertake that your charges to customers shall not be increased, nor your shareholders' dividends decreased for twenty years, we'll give

you a free run for that time. That's fair enough, surely."

Mr. Montague Rogers, taking up the hat which he had deposited on the carpet beside him, rose to go. His expression had changed to a stony aspect reserved for those who ask for overdrafts on inadequate security.

"Then you mean war," he said curtly. "I think you'll regret it."

"Of course I don't mean war. I shouldn't offer you a deal if I did."

"You know you ask the impossible."

"We both know I don't. Look here, Montague. Remember we've known each other since you were a cashier in Watford. We're both big enough to talk sense."

He took the arm of the reluctant banker, and almost forced him to resume his seat before he continued.

"I'd better talk plainly, and you'll know I mean what I say. If you'd gone out like that, you'd have found someone else in charge of your office when you entered to-morrow morning.

"I know that every previous government has been afraid of the banks. International financiers—hidden hand—all that rot. But we're not. We've got the Bank of England. We've got the currency. We've got the House. We've no enmity to you, but if you think we're coming into the City any more to learn at what rate you'll lend us money, you're wrong. You're miles out, and you have got to see it to-night, or you won't be a banker to-morrow.

"I want to tell the House to-morrow night that the banks have patriotically offered to relieve the country of all charges in connection with the National Debt, and have undertaken that the shareholders' dividends shall not be affected. I want to mention that this offer is largely due to the far-sighted patriotism of Mr. Montague Rogers. You know that's a sure peerage in January—and after that I shall add that this public-spirited offer will mean that we can abolish income-tax

altogether; and, of course, super-tax goes with it; and probably death duties. But I shall have to talk that over with Sir Chilton. Not that he really matters. Everyone except Huntley-Johnson knows that I am running this government.

"Now just think of the effect of that. Knocking off income-tax will increase the value of every security in the country by about twenty per cent to start with. And you've got twenty-four hours' notice——"

Mr. Salaman paused, and stepped back to test the effect of his words, which, however rapidly he might use them, were yet distributed with a wise economy. He felt that conversion was about due, and had no mind to go on with a sermon which was no longer needed.

Mr. Rogers, from whose arm Mr. Salaman had now released his grasp, made no further effort to escape, but his eyes showed his bewilderment.

"I don't see how I could agree to that," he began weakly, "I've no power——"

"Oh, yes, you have. They'll all follow your lead. You know that as well as I do."

"I suppose it's the best way," he continued, but still doubtfully. In his heart he knew that it had got to be. In his acute financial mind he was already weighing its costs and effects, and the methods by which the benefit of the impetus which would be given to the country's trade would fall into the right hands. After all, it wasn't so impossible. It might even have been worse.

"I won't sign anything to-night," he said, "I can't sign anything to-night," he said more firmly. "I can't sign anything till my colleagues have approved the settlement. But if my word——"

"Of course I'll take your word. I'd take your word if I didn't know that you see the wisdom of agreeing. I know you'd scheme to clear a million out of the depression in the cotton

trade without losing two minutes' sleep; but I know you couldn't sleep at all if you broke your word in a business deal. It's a queer world. Then that's settled. So glad, and thanks for calling."

Mr. Montague Rogers once more got up to go.

"Do you mind telling me whose turn comes next?" he asked curiously.

"Not at all," the Home Secretary answered. "They'd have come before you, if you hadn't called. You might save me a lot of trouble if you'll give them a hint. I don't want to interfere with the F.B.I., nor to socialise anything. I'm an individualist. But we've no use for captains of industry who leave a million workers idle. You might drop a hint of that."

As Mr. Montague Rogers settled himself into the comfort of his waiting car, he reflected wonderingly that the country was being governed again. He was a student of history.

"After three hundred years," he said thoughtfully to himself. "*After three hundred years!*"

Choice

THE man and woman had lived once on the earth, and their days had been evil.

After their kind they had loved; but their souls had been blinded by the bodies in which they lived, so that they had known each other but dimly, as forms that move in the mist.

Soul had called to soul as a half-heard voice in the darkness, and, even while they had held together, they had jarred and doubted.

Also, their years had been pallid with hunger, and sad with fear, and divided by separate sins; and their child had died. They had suffered from their own follies and from the cruelties of their fellow-men. But at the last they, being hanged, had died together. That was by the mercy of God.

And the angel of the Lord took them, one by one, to the Divine Presence.

And the man went first, for so he had died. And the Eternal God asked him: "Have you done well?"

And the man answered: "Lord, I have done little, either of good or evil. I was weak, and mean, and futile. I found pain and sorrow, which were very real; and I found love dimly.

And the Eternal God answered: "The pain is past. What would you?"

And the man thought, and answered: "I would have the woman I loved."

And the Eternal God said: "You may have asked well, but she is not mine to give. Stand aside."

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And the woman came into the Divine Presence, and the Eternal God asked her: "Have you done well?"

"Lord," she said, "I have done little, either of good or evil. I was wedded to one who was weak and futile, and I had no beauty to inspire, nor counsel to aid him. Fear and grief walked beside us, and I saw love dimly. And the child died."

And the Eternal God answered: "The pain is past. What would you?"

And the woman thought, and said: "I would have the man that I loved."

And the Eternal God answered: "You have chosen well," and He called the man, and their hands met, and side by side they went into Heaven.

And the ages passed, and the sun shone that never scorched, and the wind blew that never chilled, and the flowers bloomed that were fadeless.

They loved, and were never weary of love; they ate the pleasant fruits, and were never sated.

They thought as one, for their souls were bare to each other, as their bodies had been on earth. But those bodies had been made ugly by their parents' sins and were scarred by the jailer's stripes, and roughened by unnatural toils, and distorted by disease, and made gaunt with hunger, and piteous by the pressure of years; and their souls were now clean of the contamination of evil, and their bodies had no guile to conceal them.

But there came a day when the man said: "I have beauty and strength of form, and you are fairer than the noon in Heaven; and we have desires that do not slacken, and delights that grant them. Our souls are bare to each other in a clear light, and the flesh can neither veil nor hinder. We have forgotten shame and fear. There is never discord between us, and love is a very perfect flower.

"Yet I become less than I was on earth, a thing more despicable in the sight of God. For there I fought, though I never conquered. There I strove with evil, though it ever sloughed me.

"But here is neither evil nor good, and the best words are forgotten.

"Can we be generous, who have no need? Or valiant, who have no peril? Or merciful, who have no fear? Or magnanimous, who have no greed?

"I am become less than the meanest rat that gnaws to break the trap in which its kindred are taken."

And the woman answered: "It is even so; and I also am become less than the poorest bird that spreads defenceless wings above its eggs when the stoat approaches."

And they asked the angels of God how these things were.

And the angels answered: "You speak foolishly; for here is peace without evil, and joy is a flower that does not fall," and they drew apart, for they feared the shadow.

And the woman said: "Is there no wisdom in the angels of God?"

And the man answered: "It may be well for them. But we have known greater things."

And they rose with one thought, and went into the Divine Presence.

"Lord," they said, "we would go back to earth."

And the Eternal God said: "Do you forget so soon? Look and know."

And they saw the vision that moves in the wastes of space, and that will endure till the suns fail. The vision of the things that have been.

They saw themselves, and each other. They saw a hovel, and a dying child. They saw a man that came through a broken door. His clothes were ragged, and drenched with rain, and his hands were empty of bread. He said: "I might

have stolen, but I was afraid. As I remembered you, and the child, I was resolved; but then the watch came, and it was too late." And he sat down on a stool, and wept, for he was weak with hunger.

And the woman answered: "Then the child must die?" and there was hate in her heart, and her eyes were evil.

And they looked and knew, and answered nothing; but they returned into Heaven.

And the ages passed, and the sun shone that never scorched, and the wind blew that never chilled, and the flowers bloomed that were fadeless.

They loved and were never weary of love: they ate the pleasant fruits, and were never sated: and the child was about their knees, and it did not die.

But there were no stars.

And there came a time when they arose again with one purpose.

They came to the Divine Presence, and they said: "Lord, it is a fair life; but we have known of a better."

And the Eternal God answered: "You have known a worse. Look and see."

And they saw themselves, and each other.

They saw a square, with red-tiled houses around it. They saw a market-place of cobblestones, and a great crowd that filled it. They saw the arrogance of steel and feather, and the colours of painted shields.

They saw a cart drawn by a white horse, and there was straw in the cart, and there were two that lay bound in the straw.

Then they saw a man that cut the thongs from the captives' feet, so that they stood upright, but not steadily, a man and a woman. They were bony with starvation; they bore the scars of the red-hot pincers that had held them; and their faces were grey with fear.

They stood up, and the crowd swayed, and shouted. A priest came forward, and there was a crucifix in his hand. The man shook his head as he approached, and the woman cursed him, and he withdrew. The crowd saw it, and shouted more loudly.

They saw the man hustled up a ladder, and a halter was round his neck. They saw him pushed off, so that he twisted twice in the air, as a joint twists on the spit. They saw him lowered to the ground, while he still lived. They heard him scream as the knife entered.

When his quarters lay on the ground they saw the woman hanged in the same way; only, after the hanging, a cord was put around her neck and was drawn tightly, so that she was dead before she was quartered.

And they looked, and they said nothing; but they did not move.

And the Eternal God said: "You have seen. What would you?"

And the woman said: "Lord, why is it?"

And the Eternal God answered: "It is necessary that all things are. Yet hath none gone to the pit but of a free choice, and I also have done it."

And the man said: "Should we be apart or together?"

And the Eternal God answered: "I cannot tell you that. There are many loves that may call, and many circumstances that may divide you. If you go, you go blindly."

And the woman asked: "Have we choice of our parents or of the place of our births?"

And the Eternal God answered: "You will neither choose nor know. Birth will be a darkness behind and death a darkness before you. You will forget all that you are or have been. You will endure the night of the womb, as your body grows from the current of another's blood, and her thoughts control you; knowing panic when she fears, and causeless joy when

she pleasures. You will know the terror of birth when you are cast out with a body which is not yours, but has been made weak or strong by the passions of others. You will live through helpless years under the controls of those who may be foolish or brutal. You will be scourged by the customs of the tribe that breeds you, and enslaved by instincts that you cannot kill, though your mind may hate them. You will know remorse and shame. You will desire things which you cannot reach, or you will find your gains to be worthless. You will know pain that is more dreadful than any sorrow, and sorrow that is more dreadful than any pain. You will do evil to others, and you will suffer evil continually. At the last, you will die miserably, facing the curtain of death without assurance of immortality. For if you go, you go blindly."

And the man and the woman looked at each other, and they were silent, being afraid. But at last they said: "Lord, we will go, for we have seen that it is the better way."

And the Eternal God answered: "You have chosen well. As you have asked it is granted. Go in sorrow." For He saw that they had become as gods, knowing good and evil.

And they loosed hands, and went blindly into the pit of birth, and were not together.

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The Temperature of Gehenna Sue

DR. PORTLAND V. ASHERTON was a surprised man. He sat at his office table turning over the letter, and wondering vainly what possible business or other reason there could be that would lead Miss Vandergraft to desire an interview with him.

It was only a fortnight before that he had become famous as the man upon whom a certain government had bestowed an annual pension of fifty thousand dollars for "improvements in the compositions and methods of distribution of poison gases". Rumour said that he had supplied a formula which would desolate half a continent in three days, and at a cost in manufacture of not more than twenty thousand dollars for the entire supply. It would eliminate all manner of plant and animal life, so that, after allowing a reasonable period for rotting, there would be the opportunity for an absolutely fresh start. . . . It was a fascinating idea. Applied (for instance) to Mexico, it seemed almost worth the risk that any little error in distribution might spread to eliminate one or two of the southern States. Perhaps even Hollywood . . .

There was no doubt that Dr. Asherton was the greatest chemist of his day. He knew that himself. But that was a very different thing from being on the Social Register of the élite of American Society. One upon whom Miss Vandergraft would ask to call. It would be difficult for an Englishman to understand the feelings with which he read the letter, because there is nothing in that democratic country to correspond with the social gulf which divided them. . . . There was the possibility of hoax, but that anyone would dare to attempt it was an improbable blasphemy, such as would only be conceived,

if at all, by some recently-landed alien who knew not that which he did.

Still, explanation there must be, and Dr. Asherton was not the man to leave a problem unsolved. He considered first that there might probably be a connection between this approach and the subject of his recent publicity. From that deduction it was easy to conclude that Miss Vandergraft's mind had been disturbed by the possibilities of the wholesale warfare rendered possible by such inventions. Probably she required an assurance from the Fellowship of International Scientists that Bailey's Beach would be protected under every possible circumstance. He saw nothing unreasonable in that. It was another point on which his mental process would be difficult to an English mind, but a citizen of the United States will understand very easily.

He was reminded of a letter he had had from Dr. Liebstein of Prague a few days before, suggesting that there should be a secret convention among the scientists of all nations protecting certain areas in which they could reside securely, or undertaking to communicate among themselves the antidotes of any gases that might be invented. Such an arrangement would make the use of these wholesome agents of destruction unimportant, if not actually beneficial in their operations, especially as the politicians would not be included in the protective treaties. . . . There was no doubt that he would see Miss Vandergraft. The audacity of refusal did not invade his mind.

Miss Vandergraft was somewhat shabbily dressed in black. She leaned on an ebony stick. She came up in the elevator with a younger lady in attendance, whom she told to wait in the outer room when she was shown into Dr. Asherton's office.

But Dr. Asherton did not see a dowdy elderly woman with

an awkwardly shapeless body, surmounted by a shapeless face. He saw the one remaining arrogance of aristocracy that the world holds. He saw the royalty of the United States. He saw Miss Vandergraft.

The lady appeared to be puzzled a moment by the conventional idiom, and then accepted it with a nod. She plunged into her subject without further fencing, and Dr. Asherton quickly realised that he had not guessed the subject of her visit correctly. Indeed, as she sat opposite him, he could see its absurdity. It would never cross her mind that her country could be so negligent or incompetent as to fail to provide for her security, and had she done so, she would not have come to him. She would have sent a note to the President to have the matter put right at once. What are Presidents for?

"I suppose, Dr. Asherton," she began, "you've heard about Harry, and Gehenna Sue?"

Dr. Asherton had not. But he felt that a simple negative would be ill received. He collected what information he had in an orderly mind. He knew that Miss Vandergraft's nephew, the young multi-millionaire, was named Harry. He knew that Gehenna Sue was a Broadway star. He believed (accurately) that Gehenna was not of the nature of a descriptive adjective, but merely indicated the Colorado mining-town from which she came. Yet no one would be likely to think it unfitting. Gehenna Sue did not go upon the stage with any calculated vulgarities. There was no need to instruct her in the measure of indecency which a Broadway audience expects to get for its money. She would be just herself, and if there were a call for more, it would not be because they were dissatisfied with what they had received already.

"You don't approve?" he said tentatively.

Miss Vandergraft's reply was explosive, but indicated that he had guessed the nature of the trouble with sufficient accuracy. Yet why on earth should she come to him? Was

he to be asked to gas this bare-limbed female for the recovery of Miss Vandergraft's peace of mind?

So he wondered, while that lady blew off steam in a final arraignment of Gehenna's Sue's character, which ended in an inarticulate snort.

"By which you mean," Dr. Asherton asked, with the scientist's preference for precision of statement, "that she is not strictly celibate?"

Miss Vandergraft did.

"I am extremely sorry," he went on, with a suitable gravity, "to hear of this unfortunate entanglement. Yet I scarcely see what I can do to help you. Unfortunately, I am not acquainted with either of the young—the parties concerned. If the matter be serious, might it not be better to buy her off?"

Miss Vandergraft said grimly that it couldn't be done. She remembered the derision with which Harry had told her that the young woman was earning four thousand bucks a week. (Harry would use those vulgar words, say what you might.)

Dr. Asherton feebly suggested that even marriage might not be a permanent evil, the young woman's character being what it was. Divorce is easy to get.

Miss Vandergraft snorted again. Divorce is easy for the rich, but it is not cheap. There would be the question of alimony. The Courts of the United States are inclined to be liberal to the young women that millionaires discard periodically, from whatever cause—liberal with money which is not theirs.

Dr. Asherton agreed. He withdrew his suggestion. But what could he do?

"I thought," Miss Vandergraft answered, coming to her point at last, "that you might give me something."

"I'm afraid," he answered, after one moment of startled silence, "that I don't quite understand." Did she think him a vendor of poisons for *private* use? The inventor of poison gases was shocked by such a suggestion, even from her.

Miss Vandergraft answered at length, making herself clear. She understood that the scientists of the Middle Ages were a poor lot. Yet in mediæval Italy the love-potion, either of attraction or repulsion, had been a regularly manufactured article. People wouldn't have gone on buying things that were no good. Were the scientists of God's own country to be outdone by back numbers like that? She wanted something that would make Harry feel so that the next time the young woman came fawning round him, he'd kick her off like a dog.

Dr. Asherton answered with deliberation. He did not deny that there was probably something more than imposture in the potions of the old alchemists. They were certainly experts in poisons. We had had to regain much of their knowledge, which we had first regarded as superstition. But—and just then a thought came to him. There was a recent discovery of his that he had not had an opportunity of trying upon any members of the human race. He had not considered it in such a connection as this, and yet—what effect *would* it have? . . . Yes, he saw his way to the experiment without difficulty or detection, and to being paid instead of having to pay.

"I don't say it couldn't be done," he said, "but it would mean a huge fee."

"I would give five thousand dollars when I had seen it act," the old lady said, with a tone of benevolent liberality.

"I should require fifty thousand paid in advance."

"I couldn't possibly think of that," Miss Vandergraft replied, in a tone of finality.

"I should require an undertaking of secrecy, with a penalty of the same amount if it should be broken," he went on in a tone of equal firmness.

She changed her ground weakly. "Could you guarantee that it would succeed?"

"There would be absolute certainty."

"There wouldn't be anything criminal? It isn't vitriol?" she asked fatuously.

"It will have no more result than a change in temperature."

Miss Vandergraft was not impressed. If Dr. Asherton thought that Gehenna Sue was suffering from a genuine passion for Harry—fancy Harry inspiring a—well, he had another guess coming.

"You don't do any good that way," she said. "She's as cold as a fish."

"That," Dr. Asherton answered confidently, "is just the idea."

Gehenna Sue had an expensive flat. She had an expensive maid. She had expensive clothes. She had very expensive cosmetics. She had bought all these with a pair of active legs and an exceptionally pert vivacity.

But this expenditure was not exhausted. They had still to buy her a husband suitable for the first lady in the land, which she did not doubt herself to be. Harry Vandergraft had the bucks, and he had the name. But for the frequent refilling of the flask in his hip-pocket, he might have been quite a nice boy. She was not unreasonable. She knew that it was absurd to look for great wealth without its natural results. To inherit millions is a test which few characters can endure. In Harry's case it might have been much worse.

She was in good spirits when he came this afternoon, having had an amazingly improbable call from his aunt half an hour before, at which the old lady had been almost affable, and had responded at once to the suggestion that they should have a drink together. She had been afraid that she had offered her guest a poor bottle of wine, for it had seemed somewhat bitter to her, but Miss Vandergraft had appeared quite satisfied, so she had taken another glass for herself, which had certainly tasted better. When the drinks were over, her visitor had left

somewhat unceremoniously, but without actual rudeness. Look at it how you would, it meant a great deal! It was parley, if not surrender. She told Harry about it at once.

But Harry was at the gloomy stage of inebriation. He remarked sombrely that if the old tabby had come to poison her, it would be the most likely thing. Gehenna Sue, who knew from film and stage (from which, and the bar of a Gehenna saloon, all her knowledge of life came) that ladies are quite liable to poison those upon whom they call, had a moment's panic as she thought of that bitter taste, and then put the silly idea out of her head with a natural optimism and the consciousness that she was feeling quite well. Yet it recurred to her later, and was largely responsible for the events which followed.

. . . She was not conscious of any change in herself. The room had become uncomfortably, inexplicably warm. Harry was strangely hot to touch. But she still felt her vigorous, tireless self, and she proceeded to his wooing with her philosophy of the gutter, which consisted mainly in offering him the freedom of nine-tenths of her person, and provoking a continual consciousness of the remaining fraction.

She found him puzzlingly unresponsive, even considering the stage of drunkenness through which he was passing, and when he threw himself down on the couch, and she perched herself on its head, and put her legs round his neck in a way which he ought to have appreciated, he pushed them roughly away, with an irritable enquiry why she was so damned clammy this afternoon.

"The fact is, Harry," she said at that, "you're just ill, and you'd better make a streak for home before you get worse. I won't have you falling ill here. There'll be no scandal in this flat. Not for this baby. You're too hot to touch."

Harry Vandergaft went, a rather frightened man.

But Harry Vandergaft was not so frightened as Sue became

when she returned to the flat in the early morning from her usual performance. She had had experiences which might have puzzled a much wiser girl than she was ever likely to be.

She had one turn, the humour of which consisted in her audacious wooing of a sanctimonious young man, who shrank from her advances with all the evidences of acute shock. It was always a winner, but never before had he acted with such convincing realism as to-night, when he had untwisted her clinging arms as though they were actual reptiles about his neck. Only at last had he gone wrong. At that moment, when he was expected to be overcome by her seductions, he failed to rise to the required occasion. He had submitted, indeed; but it had been with the expression not of one in Paradise, but rather as enduring a reluctant Purgatory.

And then the stage manager, when he had slapped her shoulder, as we all know that managers may, had had a sudden look on his face as one who touches an unexpected worm. And—there had been other things.

Gehenna Sue, lying awake in the night, and kicking off bed-clothes for which she felt no necessity, was vaguely conscious of a change in herself which she found inexplicable. It was then that she remembered what Harry had said. It is a curious reflection that the truth seemed more probable to her than it might have done to a more sophisticated mind. Miss Vandergraft had done something to her. Something sinister. The suspicion grew to conviction. Something to make her unattractive to men. . . . Well, she would return the call.

Having formed this resolution, she felt better, in spite of the oppression of the over-heated room. She got out of bed to turn off the heat. The polished floor was not as hot as the central rug. Under the window it was almost normal. It was there that she went to sleep.

Miss Vandergraft was no coward, or she might have declined

the interview, as her servants expected her to do. But she had a great curiosity. Also, she was a business woman. She had paid fifty thousand dollars for the half-spoonful of powder which she had dropped into the glass of Gehenna Sue. Was she not to see its effects? She said: "Show her up."

The two ladies shook hands, and though Miss Vandergraft had less excuse than most for any surprise at what she felt, she controlled her repulsion with difficulty. It was like handling a fish.

"Do I feel cold to you?" Sue enquired sweetly, and then added, without waiting for a reply: "You'll be quite as cold half an hour after you've been plugged."

We know that Miss Vandergraft rejected slang from her vocabulary, but she had no difficulty in following Gehenna Sue's meaning on this occasion, assisted as it was by the sight of a small silver-mounted revolver which lay placidly in her visitor's hand. She began to feel an anticipatory chill which was most uncomfortable.

"How about putting things right before you go where you belong?" Gehenna Sue asked.

"I don't know what you mean," Miss Vandergraft replied, shaking like a dignified jelly.

"That's rough on you. It was the one chance you had not to cash in. . . . See here, old woman, I'm not going on living like this, with everyone round me as hot as pie, and just drawing away at the first touch like a snail's horns. If you know how to get this right, you can put me wise, and I'll let you go on till I've tried it out, and then we can finish our talk. But if you don't know, or won't say, it's a good-sized box and 'this our sister' for you."

"If I give you the man's name——" gasped the desperate woman, who saw no mercy in the fish-like eyes that were fixed upon her.

"So there's a man in it? I might have guessed that. You haven't the brains to . . . Well, spit it out."

"Dr. Asherton gave it to me. He lives at——"

"Yes, I know. Overlooks Central Park. He's that stinking poisoner who lives near where the real doctors are. Harry showed me his house, when we were by that way last Sunday. I suppose this is about his size. Well, if he puts it right, it'll be luck for you. Like a good feel before I go? You'll be plugged if you squeal."

Miss Vandergraft felt the muzzle of the revolver against her chest. It was cold enough, but not so cold as the arm that was round her neck; not nearly as cold as the corpse-like face that was laid against her own. But she was too frightened to scream.

Dr. Asherton was distinctly uncomfortable. He had been awakened from the afternoon doze which had become the habit of his obese and prosperous days, to find a young woman regarding him with an expression which made it evident that her attractions were not for him. He had scarcely put his hands up, which is an uncomfortable thing to do when you are lying on your side on a couch in your own room, and rather stiff and heavy from an interrupted doze, before he guessed who his visitor was, and found no satisfaction in the thought. Her words quickly confirmed his suspicion.

"So you're the guy that gives folk the chills? Folk that have done you no harm. . . . *What did she pay you for that?*"

The question brought the terms of the bargain to the scientist's mind. Miss Vandergraft had actually paid fifty thousand dollars down, and had left a further cheque for the same amount in his hands to be used as a penalty should she bring his name, by whatever indiscretion, into the foreground of the event. He considered, not unreasonably, and with a coolness that did him credit under the circumstances, that that cheque was now his. Under the persuasive influence of that

confronting muzzle, he narrated these circumstances.

"You can give me that cheque," was the cool comment of his unwelcome visitor, "and what you picked up before. That'll let you out, if you put it right in about two ticks. *I suppose you can?*" There was a note of not unnatural anxiety in the concluding question.

Dr. Asherton admitted that he could. He went further, saying that he was prepared to do so. But he had now recognised the strength of his position. She was in his hands, as he in hers. If he restored her to her former temperature, he would not also surrender the money which was his only recompense for the trouble he had undertaken and the annoyance he now sustained. But he found her as hard at a bargain as he could be. In the end, it was agreed that he should keep the money he already had, and that the second cheque should be handed over to Gehenna Sue, as it was through her energy that it had become due for collection.

"I will, in fact," said the inventor of poison gases, when this treaty had been reached, and he was allowed to assume a more natural posture, "do more for you than I have undertaken. The loss of temperature which you have sustained can only be restored by an injection which will have the further effect of giving you the complexion of a child of ten. Not," he added, "of a Colorado child, but of one who has been born to a more salubrious climate."

At these words, the fish-like face of his visitor assumed, for the first time, an uncontrollable excitement. It had been the one point on which she had ever allowed to her own mind that she was something less than perfect. Prior to the catastrophe of yesterday, she had had a somewhat yellow skin.

"Poppa," she said, almost affectionately, "if you can do that, you'll have a real hug from this baby."

They went into the laboratory together.

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Looking at a completed incident, we may observe that there was no cause for tears. Dr. Asherton was a richer man by fifty thousand dollars, at the cost of an hour's work, and a minute's fright. Miss Vandergraft, at the cost of a hundred thousand dollars, which she would never miss, had gained the object at which she aimed; for Gehenna Sue, considering her augmented bank account, and her miraculously-improved complexion, decided that she was too good for anyone but an English duke. She is the present Duchess of Towchester. Even Harry—well, when a man is already absorbing all the liquor of which he is physically capable, is it possible for him to take to drink, however much he may desire to do so? It did no harm—even to him.

Original Sin

I AM XP₄₃₇₈₈₈₂. I write this with a pen, on sheets of paper in the old way, instead of speaking it into a recorder, because I want it to have a chance of survival, even though a time should come when no more of those instruments can be made or preserved; and because it is a very private thing. If this should be seen by one who could read its words, my death would be nearer even than are those of the men and women among whom I move.

I am writing on the 28th day of September, 2838, being nineteen years of age yesterday, and my friend Stella being two minutes younger than I. We two are the youngest people now alive in the world, having been born somewhat after our time, though there may be eight millions of those who are not more than fourteen days older than we.

For when men conquered disease, and the life of a healthy child became a certain thing, there was a law made that no parents should have more than three (though they could have less if they would, and there were always some that were barren; but there was margin enough for that, and for such as died young, being scalded, or burnt, or perhaps choked with a bone); and when it was soon seen that it was a foolish thing for these children to be born whenever their parents would, as in the old disorderly days, there was a further law that there should be a space of five years during which all married people might have what children they would (being not more than three), and after that there should be a period of twenty-five years when none should be born at all.

This worked well in more ways than might be thought at the first, for the children bred were all of a like age, and could

be taught at one time, and would advance in a level way, whether at task or game, and the training of each year was in no more than three grades, and they were of a like age to wed when the time came, and would be still in their youth when the law was that they might have children themselves. There was time to plan how the next generation should be reared and taught, and each was divided from each in a clear way.

So it has been now for three hundred years, and each generation has been born into a fairer world. There is no disease. There is no dirt. There is no hunger or thirst. There is no pain. There is enough for all of all things that a man can need, so that there is no cause either to envy or hate, either to strive or long.

Men have learnt to see that they need not die till their strength fail, and then death can be made pleasant enough; but the question of why they live has been left unsolved, and it is one which has been asked in an ever more urgent way.

It is over a century ago that the Doctrine of Futility was first discussed, in records, two of which still remain. It was not regarded seriously at first, and was freely allowed. But there came a time when it became a cult, which some held strongly and others disliked with the emphasis which the law of Moderation forbids.

Consequently, it was banned, and all recordings erased, excepting only those which were preserved in the Great Museum at Timbuctoo.

There was cause for this law, as it had been found that men might hold different opinions with an obstinacy of assertion which would lead to violent quarrels, when wounds might be given, even such as would cause death; and there had been a general determination to remove all occasions of premature decease from the world.

Opinions must not be publicly expressed, except those on which all men were united, excepting only such a minority as would not dare to dissent aloud, lest they should provoke the Law for the Elimination of Pests, which no one would wish to do.

But these prohibitions were revised every twenty-five years, and it was a remarkable observation that the great majority of controversial questions would become innocuous in such a period, like a wasp that had lost its sting.

This did not happen so quickly to the Doctrine of Futility, but at each successive revision it was regarded by the Guardians of Public Tranquillity with an increased benevolence, until, at the fourth review, there was the necessary unanimous agreement that few would dissent from, and no one would be likely to be seriously disturbed by, the theory which it propounded.

That, briefly stated, was that sentient life on the Earth, and particularly the forecasting and introspective self-consciousness of mankind, is an evolutionary blunder or, at best, a futility, inevitably destined to be corrected by the deliberate action of its own products so soon as they should reach an intellectual maturity sufficient to enable them to recognise both their own abortion and their power to terminate it.

Sooner or later, it was argued, mankind must reach a maturity of thought which would recognise the vanity of the procession of life and death, and, by its own deliberate and orderly extinction, restore the Harmony of the Universe, which had been momentarily disturbed by the flicker of sentient life on the planet on which we live.

This theory, being released anew by the Guardians of Public Tranquillity as a harmless, and even obvious, proposition, was accepted at first with the passive assent due to that which all men can clearly and equally see. But that mood was quickly succeeded by one of excited interest, as it was realized that

it offered a prospect of affirmative action to men whose lives had been negative till that hour.

The elimination of every kind of adversity from the experience of human life had left it both emotionally and intellectually barren, without hope and without fear. Its futility had an indisputable quality. Men felt that they had already arrived on the crest of the wave of life—a crest where they scarcely were or did.

But here was something that could be done; something to break the monotony of eventless days. With alacrity, even with enthusiasm, men caught at the idea, discussed, approved, planned. As they did so, their eyes brightened, their listless motions quickened, their voices stirred slightly from their accustomed drawl. Paradoxically, life became faintly valuable again, as the prospect of its destruction engaged their minds.

Should they attempt the extinction of life of every kind? It might be beyond human power. It would certainly be an enterprise of extraordinary difficulty. Actually, all the higher forms of life, apart from mankind, had, for reasons of safety, prudence, or sanitation, been eliminated during several previous centuries. Only its more rudimentary forms remained, and these in severely restricted forms. To sterilise every germ of life in ocean and land and air—no, it could not be done. But such as would remain would be elementary in character: they would be of doubtful consciousness, and surely incapable of the curse of thought. They must be left to blunder to their own ends in their own ways.

But the futility of human life, all its aimless recurrences, could be ended now.

And though, as has been said, as men planned thus, they began paradoxically to feel that they had some purpose in life again, so that, with the thought of its destruction, its value rose, yet they did not therefore weaken in their resolve, for to do so would be to sink back into the sorrowless, joyless

atrophy which, as they thus became half-awake, was their greatest dread.

Such has been the talk around us for the last year, while plans for its realisation have been developed and approved. It was a doom which even the young accepted with some degree of pleasant excitement rather than sharp demur, for when nothing has happened for nineteen or twenty years of monotonous days—I will not say that I did not accept it myself until the plan was announced in detail, and Stella drew me apart to a secret place, where our whispered voices could not be overheard or recorded in any way, and said, very quietly: *“Don’t you see what this means for us?”* And then: *“Don’t speak to me again, or give any sign if you mean to do what I hope you will. You’ll throw away the last chance if you do. But I had to let you know how I feel, or you might not have guessed you could count on me.”*

II

It is only a week till it will happen now, and no one has guessed what is in my mind, nor has the plan been altered in any way that would make it vain. I have not looked at Stella, nor, I think, has she looked at me, nor given any sign of what I know she is thinking and hoping now. But she can’t be sure, because it must depend upon me. I might leave her alone, and I wonder what she would do then? Or, of course, before that, I might give her away. While I don’t she must see reason to hope. . . .

The plan is that the oldest ones will go first, while all the comforts remain. There is evident sense in that, and in any case their time for liquidation would be very near.

After that, the younger ages will go, progressively downward, and the means of sustaining life will be destroyed in the same progressive manner, so that, when it will come to

those of our own age, if we do not destroy ourselves, it will be impossible to live as we do now.

In particular, the means of regulating temperature will be gone, so that we should only be able to resist cold or heat in the old crude ways—by clothes or roofs and walls, or the lighting of fires. And the provision of food would present such difficulties that it is hard to see how they could be overcome. It seems absurd to think that anyone should be willing to remain alive under such conditions as that. But, if Stella thinks it may be worth while—after all, we can always die.

III

It has begun, and the first million, or more, are already dead. The method is that each in turn shall receive an injection from the one next below him on the list, after which he will pass into pleasant dreams. It is a drug that is often used, so that its effects are exactly known. There is an antidote by which man can recover without evil effect, if it be given within two or three hours, but if they be left without it, their sleep drifts into death.

The injection is best given in the spinal column, so that it can be done better by a man's neighbour than by himself.

Elaborate arrangements for the comfort of all have been made, and the routine is swift, so that it will be no more than three days before my turn and Stella's will come. But we had a fright this morning, and the fact that I found it to be a fright showed me for the first time, with certainty, what I really wish to happen.

We were called, Stella and I, before the Council of Routines. They told us that we were last on the list, which might be an alarming position, we being as young as we were, though it is evident that someone must be there. They said they had dis-

cussed changing our places with others of the previous generation who had volunteered to relieve us.

I thought it best to seem indifferent, and only said that they needn't trouble as far as I was concerned: I couldn't see that it mattered one way or other.

They turned to Stella, and she said: "Oh, don't change it for me! I don't mind being last of all. I rather like the idea."

Anyone would have thought they would have been too lethargic to say any more after that, but the liveliness with which she spoke seemed to rouse the Second Councillor up. He looked at her, almost alertly, and asked: "You will be last of all. How will you give yourself the injection? Have you thought of that?"

"Oh, yes," she said readily, "we've discussed that. I shall give it to Cerdic, and then, before it has any effect on him, he'll have time to give it to me."

The Councillors didn't look pleased at her use of my familiar name instead of my official number. It showed lack of respect for them, as she should have known. But even they may have seen the humour of making trouble on such a point, when it was not more than thirty hours, or two days at most, before they would extinguish themselves.

IV

Stella said: "I guessed that. Didn't you?"

We had just heard that there had been trouble over the two who had been proposed to take our places at the end of the list. They had been missing when their turn had come—missing, and hard to find. It came out then that it had been their own proposal to the Council of Routines that they should be put last on the list in place of ourselves, and everyone was saying that the Council had shown its wisdom in rejecting their plea.

was one whom I liked in some ways better than Stella. Anyone would.

As I filled the syringe Stella was watching me with alert impatient eyes. They met mine and I was sure that she read my thoughts.

Rida had turned her back to me now. I could see her trembling. She said: "I don't like waiting. Be quick."

I lifted the syringe, hesitating. Stella's eyes were on me, bright, hard, insistent.

I said: "I think you ought to know that there's another course you can take if——" I didn't get further than that.

Stella reached over and grasped my hand. The fatal pressure came from her, not me. It was done in a second.

She said: "Cerdic had it an inch too low." I don't know whether Rida heard. She went to lie down without looking around. What could anything, after that, matter to her?

I haven't quarrelled with Stella. What use would it be? And when you're alone in the world, and got to be very quick to find means to live——

Should we survive, and found a new race, we ought to make a better world than it was before. But it seemed to me that it was a bad start.

